

Tests

STROLLERS

51-cm TVs

MICROFIBRE CLOTHS

INDUCTION COOKTOPS

CHOICE

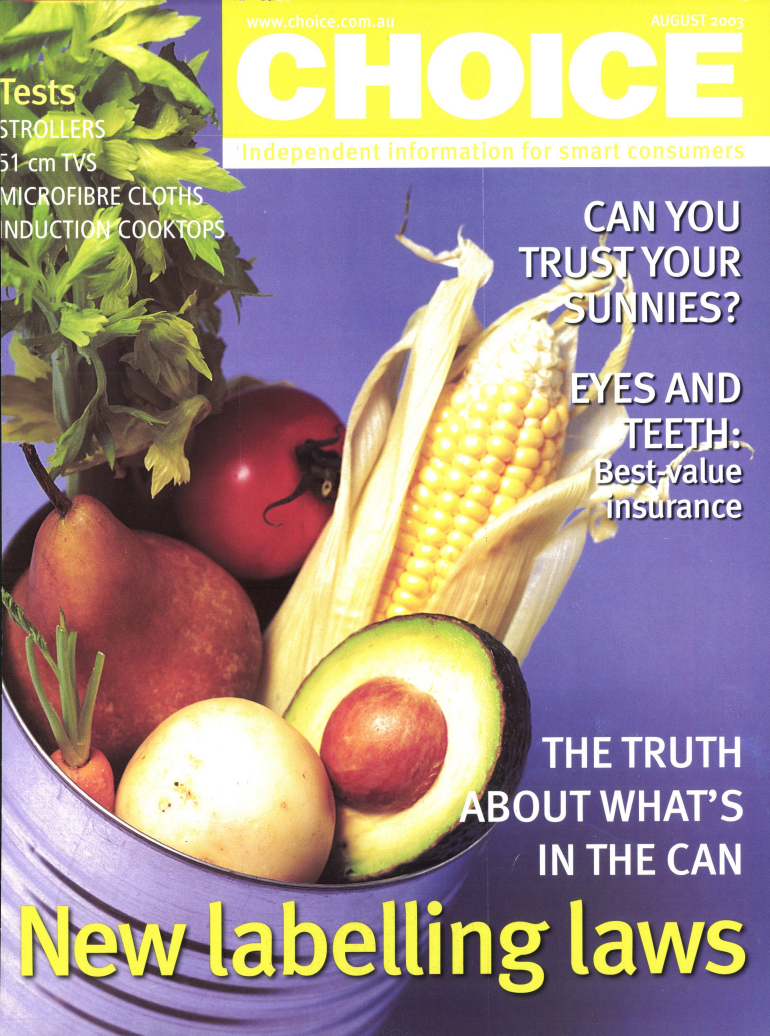
Independent information for smart consumers

CAN YOU
TRUST YOUR
SUNNIES?

EYES AND
TEETH:
Best-value
insurance

THE TRUTH
ABOUT WHAT'S
IN THE CAN

New labelling laws



COMING SOON IN CHOICE



BEER — TASTE TEST
HIGH CHAIRS
ETHICAL INVESTMENT
GARDEN HOSES
WASHING MACHINES
TOOTHBRUSHES



this month online

www.choiceextra.com.au

This is the free website exclusive to CHOICE personal subscribers (see page 3). Look out for this symbol  in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info online.



Which car?

For a limited time you can have access to the CHOICE car database, featuring information on hundreds of cars. Go to 'car database' in the A-Z index.



More about TVs

For information on brand reliability and features to look for, click on the Aug 03 article under 'Television, medium (48–51 cm)' in the A-Z index.

www.choice.com.au

CHOICE's public website, including content from *Computer CHOICE*, 'compare-a-product' features and news on consumer issues and our public campaigns.



Computer bonanza

This month check out our computer section for articles on buying a computer, firewalls, home networking, dial-up vs broadband, handheld computers and much more. Go to www.choice.com.au/computers.

Personal CHOICE subscribers can have a discounted membership to www.choice.com.au for just \$7.50 per quarter (see page 50). If you currently have free access for 12 months, this will continue until that time is up, after which the discounted subscription will be available.

Bumpy ride ahead

Few product areas are more complicated and confusing than private health insurance. In the past two issues of CHOICE we've again tried to help you find your way through the maze of hundreds of insurance policies. Knowing which policies give the best value, and which one is right for you, has never been harder. And a fund that's good value now may not be good value in a year or two's time.



Martyn Goddard

An even more important problem is whether you're getting value for money. Most people think not. In a recent survey by UMR Research, 62% thought private health insurance was poor value. And there are serious questions about management competence. Last year, 10 of the 44 funds weren't well enough managed to break even.

This industry is ripe for rationalisation. Big and small funds may merge. Conceivably, some funds could go broke, but it's more likely that poorly performing funds will be taken over. But when this has happened in the past, consumers have often ended up paying more for less. CHOICE thinks quite a few funds won't exist in another two or three years, but it's impossible to predict which ones will go.

Overall, will industry rationalisation produce more competition and better value? Will the remaining funds learn to treat their customers better — for instance, by rewriting their policies in terms ordinary humans can understand? Or will they just improve their bottom line while failing to improve their service?

Whatever happens, tough questions need to be asked about an industry that needs a \$2.4 billion annual subsidy from the government just to survive.

Martyn Goddard
Senior Health Policy Officer,
Australian Consumers' Association

PRICE INCREASE

Due to increased production costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is unfortunately increasing. The new prices, effective from October 1, 2003, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly \$16.50, one year \$66, two years \$123.
- Institution/company subscriptions: one year \$105, two years \$200.

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Now that labels have to state the percentage of a processed food's main ingredients, be prepared for plenty of surprises.

Photo: Ute Wegmann



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DIVIDE AND CONQUER?

While Australia hasn't had a separate consumer affairs agency at the federal level for many years, recent changes to the structure of consumer policy and other functions may further reduce the protection of consumers' interests within Federal Government thinking.

Consumer functions sit within Treasury — a not altogether appropriate setting anyway, given that department's role in minimising expenditure and promoting free-market policies. From May 2003 consumer functions within Treasury were split into three different divisions of the Markets Group (one of the five major divisions in Treasury).

Consumer policy is within the Competition and Consumer Policy Division, consumer safety and consumer information are in the Strategy and Administration Division, while consumer protection is with the Corporate Governance Division.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is responsible for on-the-ground enforcement of consumer regulations and standards at a federal level. And at state and territory level there are separate agencies, sometimes freestanding, sometimes incorporated into business-oriented departments, to develop policy and carry out enforcement and compliance work on the ground and to co-operate with the federal bodies.

What was that about divide and conquer?

Working towards a better CHOICE

Would you like to leave a legacy that will help Australian consumers? Consider remembering the Australian Consumers' Association through a bequest in your will, or by making a donation. Your contribution, however big or small, will support the work of a truly worthwhile non-profit organisation and help us protect and inform consumers for years to come.

Please see page 51 for more details, or call us on 1800 069 552 to receive an information package.



Does eating junk food cause acne?

Pimples are formed when there's an increased accumulation of keratin (a protein produced by the skin), which blocks sebaceous follicles. The follicles fill with sebum (a fatty substance produced in the sebaceous glands), which can become infected by bacteria that cause inflammation.

But does eating junk food have anything to do with it? Some swear it does, while others dismiss this as a popular myth. However, a recent paper reported on in July/August CHOICE *Health Reader* links high glycaemic index (GI) foods — including chocolates, sweets and fizzy drinks — with acne.

The theory (and it's only a theory at this point) is that when high-GI foods increase insulin levels, this activates a hormone sequence that increases the production of androgens. These hormones have been linked with the overproduction of keratin and accumulation of sebum.

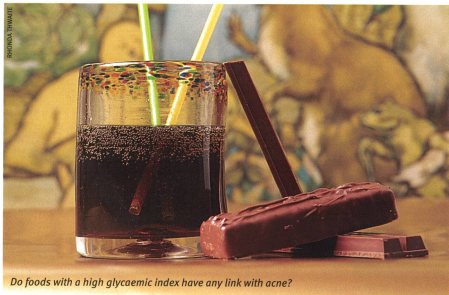
Researchers at RMIT are currently testing the hypothesis, so we'll let you know what they find.

Also in this issue:

- A study found padded hip protectors help reduce the rate of hip fractures among the elderly. The protective shields were worn over the hip bone and held in place with a snug-fitting undergarment, and reduced the risk of breaking a hip in a fall by half.

- Passive smoking has been linked to tooth decay — irrespective of sociodemographic and geographic factors. It's thought that protective antibacterial substances in saliva may be damaged by smoke.

If you'd like to subscribe to CHOICE *Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552, see page 49 or go to www.choice.com.au.



Do foods with a high glycaemic index have any link with acne?

Rental car warning

A Sydney couple want to warn readers about potential problems when returning a rental car, after they were stung for almost \$1000 for damage they didn't cause.

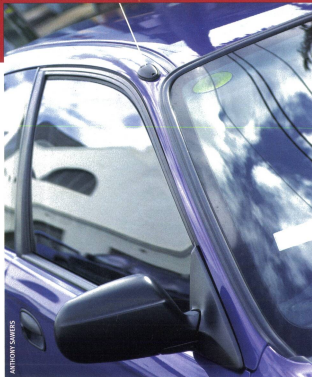
They returned their car — in the same very good condition as they'd received it — to a Perth hotel, as had been arranged with the car rental company. A week after returning home, they received a letter from the company informing them it would be charging their credit card for repairs done to the roof of the car, which the company claimed had been extensively damaged.

They'd taken out optional cover to reduce the damage liability excess to \$330. However, they later discovered roof damage was specifically excluded from this extra cover, so it didn't help them.

If the roof was damaged, as the company claimed, this had occurred some time between dropping off the car at the hotel entrance (where it was valet parked) and the car rental company inspecting it.

Fair trading offices have received many complaints from rental car users who've been charged for damage they didn't cause. Not only was fault in dispute, but also the capacity of rental car companies to charge people's credit cards, leaving them hundreds of dollars out of pocket.

Ideally the car should be inspected for damage in your presence when you return it to the car rental office — and you should insist on this wherever it's practical. But in reality this doesn't always happen: you may be told to leave it in a designated car park, or have arranged to drop it off at an airport or another specified location, including after-hours dropoffs.



You may then be charged for any damage alleged to have occurred, including any that may have been inflicted by a third party after you dropped off the car but prior to the final inspection by the rental company.

It's estimated that less than 10% of people with problems relating to rental cars make an official complaint, so up to now there's been little impetus for change. However, a national discussion paper was recently circulated, looking at consumer issues and whether there's a need for increased regulation of the industry.

In our readers' case, the credit card institution has taken up their cause and is seeking more information from the rental car company.

Quality expired

In the strollers article on page 36 we question the reliability of the five-tick StandardsMark, which we found on strollers that failed to comply with the relevant Australian standard. Now it seems relying on another StandardsMark — the Quality Endorsed Company (QEC) logo (see right) — can also have its problems.

One of our subscribers had problems with the services of a car dealer and repairer he'd chosen specifically because of its QEC certification. But when he inquired with the certifying body (Quality Assurance Services, QAS), he found out the company's certification licence had expired.

SAI GLOBAL (formerly QAS) told us that once the licence terminates, the company's rights to use the StandardsMark and claim QEC status also cease. However, SAI GLOBAL may choose not to enforce

the licence terms and conditions for a reasonable period (typically up to three months), during which time the company can use up stationery and brochures with the symbol, and make changes to *Yellow Pages* advertisements, if they contain the StandardsMark.

So if you're choosing a company based on its display of the QEC logo, make sure it's still up-to-date. SAI GLOBAL's website contains a regularly updated register of all certified companies: go to www.sai-global.com and click on the Database & Links button. Queries should be directed to assurance@sai-global.com. If you aren't online, you can phone its customer service section on 1300 360 314.



Tackling suspect fruit juice labelling

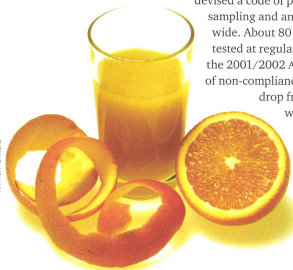
When we looked at food labelling last September we subtitled our report “don’t believe everything you read”, given the numerous examples of food labels we found that sailed close to the wind in terms of credibility.

One area of concern was the labelling of fruit drinks by some manufacturers, an example being the incorporation of 10% orange peel extract by one manufacturer to boost its fruit — but not fruit juice — content to 25%.

Over the years the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has launched legal proceedings against a number of fruit juice manufacturers whose product labels were deemed to contravene the Trade Practices Act. Perhaps surprisingly, the ACCC’s latest action, against **THE OUTBACK JUICE COMPANY** for misleading labels on its orange juice products, resulted from the scrutiny of the Australian Fruit Juice Association (AFJA), a fruit juice industry representative body.

Assisted in part by the ACCC, AFJA has established a self-regulation scheme and devised a code of practice that calls for regular sampling and analysis of fruit juices Australia-wide. About 80 juices per year are sampled and tested at regular intervals. And according to the 2001/2002 AFJA annual report, nine letters of non-compliance were sent that year — quite a drop from 27 issued to manufacturers when the scheme started in 1993.

Definitely a positive development and good news for consumers, but as the *Hard Word* from May and July this year showed, some fruit juice manufacturers still need to lift their game when labelling their products.



ANTHONY JAWORS

PYRAMID SELLING ON THE NET

We’ve been warning consumers about the risks involved with pyramid selling for years now, and it’s also illegal under the Trade Practices Act. Pyramid selling is a scheme where the main purpose is to earn money by recruiting other people. (The difference between pyramid selling and multi-level marketing is that pyramid schemes provide rewards for introducing new participants, while legitimate marketing schemes provide rewards from genuine product sales.)

The ACCC recently took action against Skybiz.com, a US web-based company, for promoting a pyramid selling scheme on the internet. It involved participants paying US\$100 for a website. They were told they could earn money for introducing new participants, and that the scheme could operate as an e-business.

The Federal Court ruled that the scheme was an example of pyramid selling, and had breached that and other consumer protection provisions of the Trade Practices Act.

The moral of the story is that while the internet is a great tool for many legitimate businesses, it’s also another means for unscrupulous operators to trap unsuspecting consumers. Don’t take the bait.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

GULP DOWN IN ANGER...

Psychologists from Würzburg University in Germany have found another reason why anger can upset your stomach. Very angry trialists just gulped down their meals rather than chewing them properly — a recipe for stomach problems.

THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE NAME

Austrian consumers have to know their food laws pretty well to avoid disappointment. *Konsument* magazine reports that many complained about a supermarket’s house-brand product (apricot fruit dumplings), which came nowhere near in quality to the popular brand-name apricot dumplings it replaced. The house-brand product contained only a jam-like filling, of which the small fruit pieces only made up 45%; the rest was taken up by the usual suspects: water, sugars, modified starch, stabilisers, thickeners, flavours and so on. How is anybody supposed to know — except the legal eagles, perhaps — that under Austrian food laws ‘apricot dumplings’ must contain whole apricots, but ‘apricot fruit dumplings’ don’t have to?

PARKING THE SMART CAR

Now that DaimlerChrysler’s tiny Smart Car has finally reached Australian shores, we wonder whether authorities here will also take the fun out of parking it the unconventional way: at right angles to the curb, like a motorbike, perhaps making endless trips around the block looking for a car space a thing of the past.

Measuring just 2.5 m long, the Smart Car almost fits at a right angle in parallel parking zones, but German authorities won’t allow it, reports *Test* magazine. Why? Mainly because it would stick out by around 80 cm, making manoeuvring into and out of parking spaces difficult for other drivers, and it would be hard to see at night.



ANTHONY SAWERS

Fuelling the debate

Your story about ethanol (May 2003) helped clarify some misconceptions but it left readers hanging on several key aspects.

Recent US, Canadian and other overseas studies have shown that a reduction in government revenue from excise exemption for ethanol is easily offset by increased tax revenues through job creation and economic activity. Clearly, the Treasurer's 2002 Fuel Tax Enquiry Report failed to look deeply enough in stating that tax concessions for petrol substitutes are "likely to result in a misallocation of resources".

Benzene is known to induce leukaemia. We're reliably advised that, from a public health perspective, the capacity to reduce benzene content by addition of ethanol vastly outweighs the very slight increase in aldehyde emissions.

There are no car warranty issues with ethanol blends up to 10%, and benefits of the broad-based use of 10% ethanol in

petrol accrue to the community through improved environmental, economic and social (including public health) outcomes. Great advances are being made with renewable fuels such as ethanol and they are clearly the fuels for our future.

Ian J Ballantyne
General Manager
Canegrowers
[Queensland Cane Growers
Organisation]

Ethanol takes a lot of energy to grow and extract from biomass — some say a similar quantity to that available when it's burned. That would mean it has an extraction efficiency close to zero.

Cars also do their job incredibly inefficiently, especially when used to transport a single occupant. Engine energy efficiency is around 20% and since cars weigh 10–20 times more than their drivers, the car moves the driver at only 1–2% efficiency.

Meanwhile, we're told that arable land is limited and that many people are starving or malnourished.

If all this is true, cultivating land for a product that amounts to virtually nil is obscene. Let's stick to chemical and medicinal uses — like drinking the stuff when not driving!

Associate Professor Frank Fisher
Director, Graduate School of
Environmental Science
Monash University

The issue of ethanol in fuel is highly contentious and, as these examples of correspondence we received demonstrate, there's a lot more to the issue than whether or not it causes car engine damage. The complexities of economics and social and environmental factors, along with the effects on the state and performance of your car, make it a difficult equation

THUMBS UP!



Rhonda Wilson,
of Lord Howe
Island, was very

impressed with **Breville** when it repaired (free of charge) and paid all shipping costs for her broken breadmaker — which was outside its warranty period.

David Bartolo gives a thumbs-up to **JB HiFi** (East Kellor, Victoria), when the DVD player he bought was marked down by \$70 six weeks after he bought it. He complained to the manager, saying he felt ripped off, and was given a free DVD of his choice "for the inconvenience".

to balance at present, with many assumptions and unknowns.

It's an important consumer issue, and one that CHOICE will be following closely.

Choosing a chemical-free cuppa

Congratulations on your article that tested for traces of pesticides in teas (CHOICE, May 2003).

Your article certainly makes it clear that labels on foods only tell us half the story. If it was compulsory for food producers to label the antibiotics, hormones and other additives present in food, labels would certainly make for interesting reading! And I expect we'd see very different buying patterns amongst consumers.

I'll sign off now, as a steaming cuppa free of pesticides is waiting!

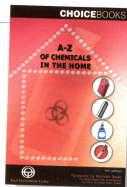
Merle Conyer
Cremorne, NSW

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 50.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Merle Conyer of Cremorne, NSW, receives *A-Z of Chemicals in the Home* or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 42 to 44.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



FOOD LABELS

uncut

Guacamole dip with 1% avocado, onion and bacon dip with no bacon, tuna pasta for babies with 2.5% tuna ... the list goes on, and some products don't pass the laugh test.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **New food labelling laws** are a mix of good and bad news for consumers. The good news is that you're told the percentage of 'key' ingredients in your food (some revelations may shock you), and as a follow-on you'll be able to work out value for money between brands as well as how much of your canned goods is actual food (versus the often throwaway liquid).
- **The bad news** is that not all manufacturers are coming to the party with regard to telling us the percentage of key (or, more correctly, 'characterising') ingredients in our food (see *Testing the waters*, page 13.)

New food labelling regulations mean the food industry has had to spill the beans. Food labels now have to list the percentage of 'characterising' ingredients or components in a food — that is, an ingredient that's mentioned in the name of the food, is usually associated with the name of the food, or is emphasised on the label in words, pictures or graphics. Examples are the percentage of fruit in a fruit yoghurt, peanuts in peanut butter or cocoa solids in chocolate.

While this new labelling is good news for consumers when it works (see *Testing the waters*, page 13, for when it doesn't), it's come at a cost. For example, we've lost a lot of food standards that specified the 'recipe' for different foods and included specifications for the minimum amount of key ingredients. For some of the things to look out for, see *Buyer beware!* on page 11.

Guess the percentage?

Our food team trawled the supermarket shelves scrutinising ingredients lists to come up with the following contenders for the wooden spoon for contents matching product name. There was strong competition.

LUCKY DIP?

With a picture of an avocado on the front of the label and the description of a "creamy blend of tasty avocados, fresh capsicums..." you'd be forgiven for expecting **MASTERFOODS Creamy Guacamole Style Dip** to contain some avocado worth talking about. In fact it's got just 1% — no doubt why it's called guacamole-style dip.

Another contender for the 'dip' prize is **KRAFT Onion & Bacon Flavoured**. It's got a whopping 31% onion, but not a piece of bacon — the hint is the word 'flavoured' tacked onto the name. And there are a few other



LUCKY DIP? ▶

interesting examples: **WATTLE VALLEY** Sweet Corn Gourmet Dip with 5% corn, **WATTLE VALLEY** Sundried Tomato Gourmet Dip with 3% sundried tomato and **KRAFT** Prawn & Crab with 4.2% prawn meat and only 0.5% crab.

VALUE FOR MONEY: YOU DECIDE

Here are a couple of examples of where labelling of the characterising ingredients can help you make a choice between brands — if you have a calculator and a spare five minutes.

COTTEE'S Hazelnut Crunch contains 16% hazelnuts (we paid \$3.65 for 400 g), **FERRERO Nutella** 13% (\$2.59 for 220 g) and **HOME BRAND Hazelnut Spread** has 8% (\$2.49 for 400 g). None is exactly brimming with hazelnuts, but when it comes to value for money, at least now you've got the info to decide.

EDGEELL Mushrooms Sliced in Butter Sauce cost us 31 cents more per 100 g than **HOME BRAND Sliced Mushrooms in Butter Sauce**, but have 13% more mushrooms and a little more butter (1% vs 0.5%). Again, it's up to you to decide which is better value for money, but working it out when they come in different-sized tins is a supermarket challenge.

If we had unit pricing like some other countries — where the price per 100 g (or whichever relevant unit) is labelled on the supermarket shelves — the calculations would be simple. **CHOICE** and consumers have been asking for this for years, but so far to no avail.

BABY WON'T MIND

Maybe the baby won't notice but, reading the label, Mum probably will: **GOLDEN CIRCLE** Tuna Pasta with Tomato Baby Food contains a mere 2.5% tuna. Don't think you'll be bumping up your infant's omega-3 fish oils with this. There's not much pasta either, at 18%. It contains more water than anything else and of course there's thickener in there as well. **GOLDEN**

CIRCLE Chicken & Vegetables Baby Food isn't much better, with only 6% chicken.

Most of the **HEINZ** baby products we looked at have slightly more meat (around 10%) but the names are still a bit shaky: **HEINZ** Steak & Vegetables with 34% vegetables and 10% beef, and **HEINZ** Organic Tender Beef with Vegetable Mash with 10% beef.

For dessert the winner is **HEINZ** Banana Custard, with a 'serving suggestion' picture of a whole banana plus sliced banana scattered around a bowl of custard: it's got just 1% banana in it — oh, and 'natural' banana flavour. And **HEINZ** Egg Custard comes up trumps with 1% egg yolks.

IRISH STEW OR VEGETABLE SOUP?

Any Irish person worth their salt knows that Irish stew means mutton or lamb with a few carrots, onions, potatoes and maybe parsnips thrown in for good measure. There's only 13% 'meat' in **HARVEST** Hearty Irish Stew, and it doesn't even say what type (the definition of 'meat' in the Food Standards Code is so broad it could cover animals from buffalo to rabbit via camel — and include things like extra fat and trimmings).



◀ **BABY WON'T MIND**

GONE FISHIN'

The standard that said canned fish must be at least 51% fish is no more (see *Buyer beware!*, far right, for more on this) and it looks as though manufacturers are starting to embrace their new-found freedom already. GREENSEAS Sweet Chilli Tuna only contains 49% tuna and GREENSEAS Oven Dried Tomato & Onion Tuna only 48%. JOHN WEST Tuna Tempters Onion & Tomato Savoury Sauce goes lower again at 46%.

For some reason you get a lot more tuna if you buy it in a foil pack (from about 65% upwards, depending on the brand and flavour).

HOW MUCH MEAT?

In years gone by there was also a standard for canned meat that said it had to contain at least 51% meat. That's long gone and forgotten — the most meat we could find in our supermarket trawl was 35% (in KRAFT Braised Steak & Vegetables).

It pays to look closely at the label. To the untrained eye HARVEST Onion & Braised Steak looks pretty similar to TOM PIPER Braised Steak &

Onions, but the HARVEST version only has 15% beef and the TOM PIPER has 34%. Here at least the names better reflect the contents, with the HARVEST having more onion (19%) than steak.

CORDIAL CONFUSION

COTTEE'S Apple Raspberry Crush and BERRI Apple Raspberry Crush both contain 24% apple and a mere 1% raspberry. And even though 'apple' is the first fruit mentioned in the name, the label gives the impression of much more raspberry than there really is (from the pictures of apples and raspberries, and the 'raspberry' colour). And if you think the colour comes from the 1% raspberry, think again — it's had a big helping hand from red colouring.

But GOLDEN CIRCLE Strawberry Lemonade Crush gets the prize here: it's 29% apple juice, 10% lemon and only 1% strawberry. Again the 'strawberry' colour gets a boost from red colouring.



▲ GONE FISHIN'

HAMMING IT UP

LEGGOS Carbonara Pasta Sauce is a 'traditional creamy Italian style sauce with bacon, fresh cream & eggs'. The only bits of bacon must be the ones on the fork in the picture — with 1.4% bacon pieces you'd be searching hard to find them.

SOUPED UP

BAXTERS definitely takes the soup prize here — its Butternut Pumpkin and Red Pepper Soup contains only 7% pumpkin and 6% red peppers. At 9%, it's got more carrot than pumpkin. And its Chicken and Sweetcorn Soup is 7% sweetcorn purée and only 2% chicken.

HEINZ Very Special Pea & Ham Soup is only 4% ham (it doesn't specify the pea content — see *Stock in trade*, page 13, for a possible reason why — but they're second on the list after water) and CAMPBELL'S Country Ladle Homestyle Pea & Ham is just 5% ham.





PHOTO: TIMMATE

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

It might taste hellish good but don't take the name at face value — read the ingredients list. The first ingredient in **PECK'S Devilled Ham Spread** is pork at 53%: sounds OK so far. But wait for it: in brackets it tells us what the pork is made up of: tongues, hearts, bacon — some people'd definitely call that 'devilled' ham. A bit of a surprise if you're squeamish about offal.

While we're on the subject of offal, the new regulations about it are a bit strange. See *Waiter! there's a snout in my soup*, page 12.

PECK'S Salmon & Lobster Fish Spread has 63% salmon, but don't get excited about the lobster — there's just 0.6% 'lobster extract' in it.



SAUCY!

SPC Baked Beans Cheesy Cheddar with a generous 0.5% cheese, **HEINZ Baked Beans Cheesy Tomato** with 1% cheese, and **HEINZ Baked Beans Ham Sauce** with 0.5% ham — they've really extended themselves.

HEINZ Cheesy Macaroni is only 2.5% cheese — we'd challenge anyone to make a tasty macaroni cheese at home with that little. Go up in the world and treat yourself to **RAGULETTO Cheesy Macaroni Pasta Bake**: it's pushed the boat out with its 6% cheese.

Buyer beware!

CHOICE fought hard to retain standards of food identity in the new Food Standards Code, with some success. Standards for a handful of 'icon' foods are still in place. These include:

- Meat pies must contain at least 25% meat.
- Sausages must contain at least 50% meat.
- Ice cream must contain at least 10% milk fat.
- Jam must be at least 40% of the fruit named on the label.
- Chocolate must contain at least 20% cocoa bean derivatives.
- Peanut butter must be at least 85% peanuts.

But a number of other standards of identity have gone by the wayside. We'll be keeping an eye on what's going on with these foods over time. Will the amount of the key ingredients diminish over the years? We'd appreciate it if you'd keep an eye out for us as well. Email us any examples to foodbites@choice.com.au.

Some examples of standards that no longer exist include:

- Wholemeal bread: the flour no longer has to be at least 90% wholemeal.
- Rye bread: the flour doesn't have to be at least 30% rye flour any more.
- Fruit yoghurt no longer has to contain at least 5% fruit (or 3.5% for passionfruit).
- Canned fish isn't guaranteed to contain 51% fish any more.
- Fish paste or spread doesn't have to contain at least 70% fish now.
- Chutney no longer has to contain at least 50% fruit (or 40% for mango chutney).



PHOTO: TIMMATE

◀ SAUCY!

WAITER! THERE'S A SNOOT IN MY SOUP

The old food regulations included a list of prohibited offal in the meat standard. This included such things as snout, genital organs, lips, lungs and scalp.

Bizarrely, though, you can now add these things — as long as you name them in the ingredients list by specific name, not 'offal'.

We can't see many manufacturers doing it, though — listing genitals or snout in the ingredients list wouldn't seem to be a big selling point.

FANCY A DECAF?

How exotic does this **JARRAH Brazil Rich Roast Creamy Coffee** look? It conjures up images of freshly ground, super-strength coffee to kick-start the day. You'd be waiting a long time to get a kick-start from this: while it's labelled as having 10% coffee (minimum), sugar is first in the ingredients list, followed by 'filler' and vegetable oil. If you read carefully on the back of the container it says it's 'Brazil style instant coffee blend' — not quite the 'finest Brazilian coffee' promised on the front.



YOU'VE BEEN CREAMED

52% corn in **GOLDEN CIRCLE Creamed Corn** (EDGEHILL Creamed Corn is a bit better at 58% corn) and 50% peas in **WINDSOR FARM Mushy peas**. Mash up your own corn and peas instead, unless of course you like thickener, water, salt and sugar.

WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT?

What percentage labelling really drives home is the fact that we're largely dealing with highly processed foods in the supermarket isles. We've come so far from homemade recipes it's not funny.

So while a tomato salsa containing 50% tomato is quite common and acceptable (they're made to a price, after all), it makes you realise that it's not 'real' salsa — you'd hardly add thickeners and water at home.

And when you buy a jar of crushed garlic you wonder why it can't be just that (with a few percent preservatives). But **MASTERFOODS Garlic Freshly Crushed** is only 56% garlic (the rest is salt, sugar, food acid and water); **CONTINENTAL Garlic** is 76%.

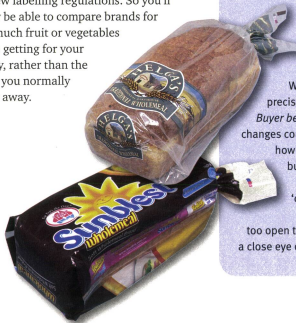




▼ DRAINED WEIGHT AT LAST

DRAINED WEIGHT AT LAST

CHOICE has been calling on manufacturers to label the 'drained weight' (or solids content) of canned food for years without any success (we last reported on the drained weight of canned food in CHOICE, October 1997). But now in essence we've got it with the new labelling regulations. So you'll finally be able to compare brands for how much fruit or vegetables you're getting for your money, rather than the liquid you normally throw away.



Testing the waters?

A subscriber wrote to us saying she'd expected, as we had, that the new regulations calling for labelling the percentage of characterising ingredients would mean that the amount of wholemeal flour in wholemeal bread would have to be disclosed — but apparently it ain't necessarily so.

George Weston Foods (which makes TIP TOP bread) told us that after a great deal of deliberation, it was decided that the flour in bread was not a characterising ingredient. Apparently it fits an exemption clause that says percentage labelling doesn't apply if an ingredient "is not such as to govern the choice of the consumer because the variation in the quantity is not essential to characterise the food, or does not distinguish the food from similar foods".

We'd argue that consumers may not have chosen breads based on their precise wholemeal content when they were secured by regulations (see *Buyer beware!*, page 11, for more). But now that safety net's no longer in place, changes could be made to recipes over time and consumers won't have any idea how much wholemeal flour is really in the bread they're buying — and buying, presumably, because they want the wholemeal attributes.

And it's not just wholemeal bread — UNCLE TOBYS isn't labelling the 'cereal' in breakfast cereal as a characterising ingredient.

We're concerned that what constitutes a 'characterising' ingredient is too open to interpretation. It's something the enforcers are going to have to keep a close eye on in the future, and the regulations may need tightening up as well.

STOCK IN TRADE

We found a number of products with a long shelf-life (canned foods mainly) that still don't have the percentage of characterising ingredients listed. Whether it's because they've decided certain ingredients aren't characterising, or because it's a stock-in-trade issue isn't clear at this point. Manufacturers have up to two years, from December 2002 till the end of 2004, to clear old stock of long-shelf-life products from the shelves.

Getting an EYEFUL?

Is the mandatory Australian safety standard for sunglasses working to protect your eye health?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Ultraviolet (UV)** radiation can slowly damage your eyes, so good sunglasses are vital for eye health all year round.
- **Four out of 20** sunglasses we bought failed to meet key optical test requirements in the Australian standard, and six didn't meet labelling requirements.
- **Aspects of the Australian standard** for sunglasses are mandatory, but the standard will change soon — what will this mean for consumers?

Planning a ski trip this winter? Or maybe you'll be trying to hook some deep-sea fish? With the ozone layer thinning out, it's not just sunburn and skin cancer you've got to watch out for. Your eyes are vulnerable to the effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation as well, so you need a good pair of sunglasses to enjoy these high-glare pursuits safely.

RAYS FROM THE SUN

UV radiation can be divided into three bands: UVA, UVB and UVC.

While it's thought that UVA exposure is less damaging to the eyes than UVB, there's still concern that long-term exposure to UVA may be linked to damage of the retina.

UVC and some UVB are absorbed by the atmosphere, but exposure to UVB is associated with the formation of cataracts on the lens — which, left untreated, can cause blindness. Some other physical changes are related to long-term UVB exposure, including even the development of malignant growths on the surface of the eye.

So just as you 'slip-slop-slap', you should be donning a good safe pair of sunglasses too. But how can you be sure the sunnies you buy will genuinely protect your eyes? To find out we bought 20 pairs of sunnies, mostly at the lower end of the price market, as a snapshot test of how safety-compliant those on the market are.

TESTING

We sent our sunglasses to an expert lab, which measured how well the lenses block glare and UV radiation — compulsory aspects of the standard. We also measured how much heat they allow through their

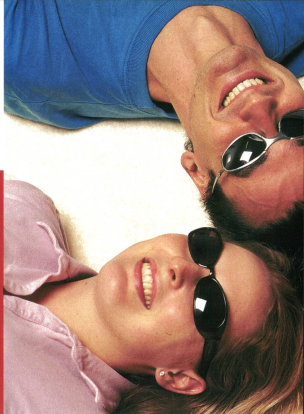
lenses (important for eye comfort but not a mandatory requirement) and whether the lenses greatly affect the perception of colour — important if you're driving and waiting for the lights to change!

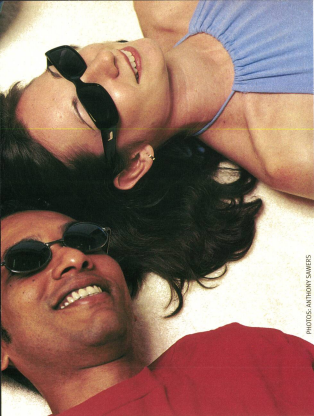
The good news is that the majority of sunglasses we randomly bought passed the key requirements of the Australian standard. However, four out of 16 'general-purpose' sunglasses failed to block enough glare. Two of these also let a lot more UV through the lenses than the other sunglasses tested, even though they still passed the standard.

According to the testing lab, "The printed specifications in the standard on UVA transmission may be too generous. Even a few percent of UVA and a fraction of a percent of UVB [getting through the lens] could fail to prevent long-term eye harm for anyone who is outside for extended periods. Our experience is that such amounts for long times can cause significant accumulation of chemical damage in most organic materials and organic molecular systems."

While this doesn't automatically mean the sunglasses in question will fail to prevent long-term eye damage, CHOICE thinks it only makes sense to buy sunglasses that give better protection. For this to be possible, sunglasses need to be tested to the standard and labelled correctly. We suspect from the gap between the UV test results of the two glasses mentioned above and those of the others that they're in fact fashion spectacles (see right). But because of the way the law is worded, if there's no type designation on the label — which there wasn't for these two pairs — sunglasses fall into the 'general-purpose' category, which has much more stringent requirements.

Our tests suggest most genuine 'general-purpose'





PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

sunglasses will pass the standard tests with very good results — but if the labelling's wrong or there is no label, you can't be certain. See *A new mandatory standard*, page 16, for more on this.

The tested sunglasses also passed other key standard optical performance tests. However, the test lab identified relatively high heat transmission in six pairs and thought that three might cause colour perception problems despite meeting the requirements of the standard. Although not as serious as failing to block glare or UV radiation, it's nonetheless undesirable for sunglasses to have these problems.

We didn't check the sunglasses to all clauses of the standard, because optical performance and labelling are the key safety requirements.

WHAT SHOULD THE LABEL SAY?

What the labels said, and what they should have said, was an area with a lot of problems in our snapshot look at sunglasses.

Six out of 20 of the glasses we bought were mislabelled in some way. It seems that sunglasses buyers are at risk of getting wrong or incomplete information (and so potentially buying the wrong sunglasses for their needs) at least some of the time.

As noted earlier, the law and the standard differ slightly on labelling requirements, but according to the standard, all sunglasses should be clearly labelled with the manufacturer's name or trademark, and each of three main types of sunglasses has the following additional labelling requirements:

■ **Fashion spectacles** must have the following statement: "Fashion spectacles: these glasses are not intended to provide protection against sun glare."

■ **General-purpose sunglasses:** While the words 'general-purpose' don't have to appear on the label, it should — if the lenses don't greatly interfere with the perception of colour — state the following: "Sunglasses — these glasses are intended to reduce sun glare in ordinary circumstances." If they interfere greatly with the perception of colour, they must be labelled with one of the following warnings: "Not suitable for persons with defective colour vision" or "Not suitable for persons with colour vision deficiencies. These lenses will further distort their colour perception."

■ **Specific-purpose sunglasses: type (a):** "Specific-purpose sunglasses for protection against very intense glare"; **type (b):** "Specific-purpose sunglasses for protection against ultraviolet radiation in sunlight for specified environments." If they affect the perception of colour too much they must show the same warnings required of some general-purpose sunglasses. Applicable to both types of specific-purpose sunglasses with lenses that block a very high degree of glare is a requirement that these be marked "not suitable for driving".

So when you're next out shopping for sunglasses, look for a pair that's appropriately labelled. That way you'll have a better chance of getting a pair that's safe and suitable for your needs.

WHO'S CHECKING?

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is responsible for enforcing mandatory consumer product safety standards. Manufacturers and suppliers of sunglasses must meet the legislated requirements of the standard (see *A new mandatory standard?*, page 16)

While it's encouraging that most of the products we tested met the key requirements of the standard, it's definitely a concern that four out of the 20 sunglasses didn't, and that six had problems with labelling.

It seems that continued vigilance by the ACCC is warranted.

WHAT NOT TO BUY

CUT PRICE 8061	\$7.50
MODA 670309	\$15.25
SUNFLOWER	\$15.00
YU TU GLASSES 811 48 18 140	\$20.00

If you bought any of these thinking they were sunglasses rather than fashion spectacles, take them back to where you bought them and get your money back — they all failed the standard's requirements for glare reduction. If you hang onto them, only wear them for fancy dress parties or nightclubbing.



IF IT LOOKS LIKE A DUCK...

... and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck, goes the saying. Is it any wonder, then, that the 'sunglasses' that failed the glare requirements of the standard all had rather pale but colourful lenses (see the photo, page 15) — a style more typical of fashion spectacles?

If these glasses had been labelled 'fashion spectacles', they'd have passed, as the glare requirements for those are less stringent than for general-purpose sunglasses. And buyers wouldn't be stuck with sunglasses that don't protect their eyes enough.



SPORTSGIRL RECALLS GLASSES

When we told SPORTSGIRL that its sunglasses failed the Australian standard's labelling requirements, it acted swiftly and responsibly by recalling the particular model from its stores. We'd like to see the other manufacturers whose sunglasses failed do the same thing.

A new mandatory standard?

The current Australian standard has been updated to bring it in line with the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. It's been modelled on the softer European standard, but in recognition of harsher Australian climatic conditions, changes have been made to prevent reducing the level of consumer protection provided.

The view of our laboratory expert is that, essentially, the new and old standards offer the same level of consumer protection — reassuring news for sunglasses buyers.

The new standard is already in effect, but manufacturers and suppliers have been given time to adapt to it. The old and new standards will coexist for about a year, and then the new standard will stand alone.

There's a gap in the mandatory parts of the standard, though. While the standard itself requires that general-purpose sunglasses be clearly labelled "Sunglasses — these glasses are intended to

What to look for

If you want to protect your eyes, you want *bona fide* sunglasses, not fashion spectacles that only have to meet minimal requirements.

So how do you make sure you're buying real sunglasses? Since it seems you can't rely on the labels, here's a guide to increasing your chances.

- Look for clearly labelled 'general-purpose' or 'specific-purpose' sunglasses with traditional brown or grey lenses. Glasses with pale blue, yellow, pink or other trendy-coloured lenses are unlikely to be good sunglasses and probably most should be labelled as fashion spectacles.
- Avoid 'John Lennon' and other minimalist styles, which can let too much UV radiation in from the sides. Use a 20 cent coin as a rough guide to check that the lens is large enough (consider this a very bare minimum). Experts recommend you choose larger lenses in a wraparound style, which more effectively prevent light entering your eyes from the top and sides. When trying on a pair, get a feel for how well the glasses' contours fit your face.
- Make sure the glasses are free from obvious defects such as sharp edges, chipped coating or visibly distorted lenses.
- Check that the manufacturer is identified by name or trademark on the frames or a tag.

reduce sun glare in ordinary circumstances", the *legislated* version of the standard excludes this labelling requirement. One effect of this is that if a pair of sunglasses isn't labelled with a type designation, the automatic assumption is that it's general-purpose. But as the CUT PRICE, SUNFLOWER and YU TU glasses in this test showed, not all unlabelled sunglasses will pass the 'general-purpose' requirements of the standard (see the table, right).

Currently, the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Treasury is reviewing the need to make the new standard mandatory, and it seems likely that a sunglasses standard will remain mandatory. However, CHOICE thinks they should make the above labelling requirement for general-purpose sunglasses mandatory. We can't see why manufacturers and suppliers shouldn't have a legally binding responsibility to ensure their products are appropriately labelled, especially when failure to do so can mean you could buy what you think are sunglasses that won't in fact protect your eyes.

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	Australian Standard performance tests					Polarised lenses*	Colour	Tinting	Price (\$)**
	1 Glare reduction	2 UVA radiation transmission	2 UVB radiation transmission	3 Colouration	Labelling				
GENERAL-PURPOSE SUNGLASSES									
AUSTRALIAN OPTICAL Vortex SSV235-SMOKE FM (A)	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	✓	Grey	Uniform	29.95
BLAZE 047 (B)	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Grey	Uniform	14.95
CLASSICS	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Grey	Uniform	24.95
CONCEPT EYEWARE L7545	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	✓	Grey	Uniform	10.00
CONCEPT EYEWARE 10004	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Grey	Uniform	6.00
CUT PRICE 8061 (C)	Fail	Pass (G)	Pass (G)	Pass	Fail (H)		Yellow	Uniform	7.50
GRAVITY EYEWARE 3018 (D)	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Brown	Uniform	19.95
MODA 670309 (E)	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Blue	Uniform	15.25
MOMENTO OPTICS 1185 (D)	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Brown	Uniform	12.99
OPTOMETRISTS CHOICE 0475	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	(N)	Grey	Uniform	29.95
PORTMANS (F)	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass (J)	(N)	Brown	Graded	29.95
RENEGADE	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail (K) (L)		Purple	Uniform	12.95
SPORTSGIRL 612944 25 Brown	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail (L)		Brown	Graded	34.95
SUN SHARK YD26067/SF C176	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Grey	Uniform	12.95
SUNFLOWER	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail (M)		Blue	Graded	15.00
YU TU GLASSES 811 48 18 140	Fail	Pass (G)	Pass	Pass	Fail (M)		Orange	Graded	20.00
SPECIFIC-PURPOSE SUNGLASSES									
AERIAL VISION SUNGLASSES 19384	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		Grey	Uniform	15.95
THE CANCER COUNCIL AUSTRALIA 9604LE	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	✓	Brown	Uniform	24.70
THE CANCER COUNCIL AUSTRALIA 9616LX	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	✓	Grey	Uniform	24.70
KILLER LOOP Exclaim 4123 613/60	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail (L)		Red	Uniform	119.95

* Polarised lenses are very good at reducing glare reflected from horizontal surfaces like water or sand.

** Prices are those we paid in February/March 2003.

(A) These glasses won't be available once current stocks run out.

(B) Discontinued in April this year.

(C) These glasses were unbranded. Store where bought is shown.

(D) Discontinued in August this year.

(E) Discontinued in July this year. The manufacturer claims when it tested the sunglasses, the lenses complied with Australian Standard requirements.

(F) Discontinued in May this year.

(G) Meets the requirements of the standard, but results are several orders of magnitude worse than the other sunglasses (see Testing, page 14).

(H) Did not have manufacturer identification or sunglass type designation.

(I) But required manufacturer/brand information was concealed by the way the tag was stapled.

(K) Confused sunglass type designation.

(L) Did not have required warning relating to colour perception.

(M) Did not have sunglass type designation.

(N) According to the manufacturer these lenses are polarised, but lab test results indicate they aren't.

1 Glare reduction

While glare doesn't harm your eyes it can be uncomfortable. Each type of sunglasses has different requirements; fashion spectacles have the least stringent (see *If it looks like a duck...*, left).

2 UVA and UVB radiation transmission

The amount of UVA and UVB radiation the lenses let through was measured and recorded as 'Pass' if it was below the limit set by the Australian standard. UVA radiation has been associated with damage to the retina of the eye. UVB radiation has been associated with the formation of cataracts and other eye damage.

3 Colouration

These tests measured how distorting the lenses are in the perception of the colours red and violet.





Still value in super?

Debbie Jackson from Victoria wants to know if it's still worthwhile contributing extra to a super fund in the form of salary sacrifice.

"Or is it a waste of money as so many funds are making losses at the moment?" Debbie asks.

Alex Dunnin, research director for Rainmaker Information, said balanced super funds were just about "back in the black" at the end of the 2002-2003 financial year.

"The market has actually come back in the last couple of months. Back in February, the typical balanced super fund was sitting on a -8% return for the 2002-2003 financial year. By the end of the financial year balanced not-for-profit super funds (industry, corporate and government funds) were expected to return between 0% and 1%. Wholesale master trusts were trailing behind at -2%.

"That doesn't sound very glamorous but super is still such a great long-term investment," Dunnin says.

Growth funds have incurred much greater losses than balanced super funds so will take longer to recover.

Salary sacrifice works best if you're in a high income tax bracket. Money is paid into super (which is taxed at 15%) out of your gross pay. If you're paying the highest marginal tax rate of 47% (plus the Medicare levy), you'll be well ahead of most other investments.

'Safe havens' can be risky

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) recently issued a warning about risks associated with some fixed-interest investments.

"Some of the most damaging financial losses suffered by Australians have occurred with fixed-interest products offering only 2% higher than the going rate for term deposits," says ASIC's executive director of consumer protection, Peter Kell.

"Right now high-return fixed-interest investments offered through prospectuses are being actively marketed to investors. Sometimes the interest they offer is compared with the returns you would get from a term deposit," Mr Kell says.

"Many investors want higher returns, but they need to understand that these investments, especially unsecured notes, involve higher risk with less security," he says.

"You can't get 3.5% to 6% more than a term deposit without involving extra risk, so check the details of the offer closely."

ASIC recommends reading prospectuses carefully. "What purpose is the money being used for? For example, if they're borrowing for property development and the development turns sour, investors could be left with losses."

Fixed interest investments: Check the label, right, explains the level of risk and return you can expect from different types of fixed-interest investment.

"Don't put all your money into one higher-return fixed-interest product, especially if you couldn't withstand any loss of capital," ASIC recommends.

FIXED-INTEREST INVESTMENTS: CHECK THE LABEL

Investment type	Who offers them?	Level of risk	Level of return
Term deposits	Banks, building societies, credit unions and other prudentially regulated institutions.	Lower risk because the providers are specially regulated.	Lower returns.
Mortgage debentures	Companies through a prospectus. By law they must be secured by a first mortgage over land given to the trustee. Loan to valuation ratio must not exceed 60%.	Medium risk, but investors have a trustee to act for them. Accuracy of land valuation is critical.	Typically medium returns.
Debentures	Companies through a prospectus. By law they must be secured by a first mortgage over land or a 'charge' over tangible property sufficient to repay the money raised.	Medium risk. Investors have a trustee. True value of land or other property is critical.	Typically medium returns.
Unsecured note or unsecured deposit notes	Companies through a prospectus. Not required to have a first mortgage over land or a 'charge' over tangible property.	Higher risk. Investors rely entirely on the financial strength of the company.	Higher returns.

Source: ASIC.

Use our Best Buys
to find a policy
that's appropriate
for your needs.



ANTHONY SAWERS

Teeth, eyes & other extras

Like many other consumers Eleanor Patterson wasn't pleased when the premium for her combined hospital and extras policy went up earlier this year to \$100 per month — and that's after the 30% government rebate. Says Eleanor, "Given that I didn't claim much on my extras cover last year and usually just need dental and podiatry services plus occasionally physio, I certainly don't think I'm getting value for money."

Eleanor tried to check her cover — which proved to be difficult. She says, "They seemed to be phasing out the top-cover ancillary product I was on, so there wasn't any information about it on their website and I couldn't compare it to the other products."

She considered changing to another fund but decided against it, fearing she'd have to serve waiting times again. She also considered taking out a restricted hospital policy, but decided to keep her current level of cover "just in case" and instead to take out a less comprehensive extras policy — one that would still give her the cover she really used, but had a lower premium.

Compare *your* ancillary policy with our Best Buys: all of them have a competitive premium and at least a 70% policy score. While they aren't necessarily the

most comprehensive policies available, they provide comparatively good value for money.

SINGLE, COUPLE OR FAMILY?

Usually a family, single-parent or couples premium is double the single premium. While families with children should generally take out a family or single-parent policy, as this covers their children as well, couples without children may prefer to take out two different singles policies. This may make sense if partners need cover for different things or different levels of cover.

For example, Susan and Ben took out two extras policies rather than a couples plan. While Susan decided on a basic young singles policy with a low combined payout limit for a range of services, Ben chose a policy that gives him 60% cover for a wide range of treatments with good annual claim limits.

Susan needs basic cover for general dental work and some cover for physiotherapy, and also makes use of the cover for massage and acupuncture; she's happy with these limited services and the comparatively low premium. Ben needs cover for major dental and doesn't mind paying a bit more for a higher level of cover "just in case".

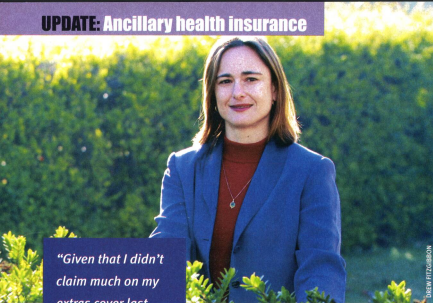
IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Ancillary health insurance** covers non-hospital treatments that aren't covered by Medicare — for example, going to the dentist or physiotherapist, glasses and contact lenses, plus less common treatments such as acupuncture or podiatry.

■ **We surveyed nearly 300 ancillary (extras) policies** to come up with Best Buys.

■ **For contact details of the funds and information about hospital insurance**, see last month's issue of CHOICE or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Jul 03 under "Hospital insurance".





"Given that I didn't claim much on my extras cover last year and usually just need dental and podiatry services plus occasionally physio, I certainly don't think I'm getting value for money." — Eleanor Patterson, Norwood, Tasmania.

DOES YOUR POLICY GIVE YOU VALUE FOR MONEY?

To check whether your current policy gives you value for money, look at your ancillary premium for the past few years and estimate how much money you got back from your claims per year. If you consistently pay considerably more money than you get back, you'll probably save money by cancelling or switching to a more appropriate policy.

However, before cancelling consider whether your needs might change in the future, as waiting periods will usually apply

What's the score based on?

The assessment for extras cover is based on a score for the level of cover you receive for the most highly used categories of services, according to the 2001/02 annual report from the Private Health Insurance Administration Council.*

- Dental (based on 65% general dental, 25% major dental and 10% orthodontics): 54%
- Optical: 17%
- Physiotherapy: 7%
- Chiropractic/osteopathy: 7%
- Pharmaceuticals (this usually covers only medication that isn't covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme): 3%
- Other services, such as acupuncture, natural therapies, speech therapy, podiatry, psychology, and health management aids such as nebulisers, blood glucose monitors and hearing aids: 12%

The score for these services also includes an assessment of the total benefits you could receive for a range of services in the first and second year of your membership.

* Previously the score also included fitness cover, which made up 3% of the total benefits received. We've excluded this as at the time of writing it was unclear whether cover for these services would be available for much longer.

For more information on the funds included and their contact details, see *Hospital insurance* in CHOICE, July 2003, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Jul 03 under 'Hospital insurance'.

again — for example, services like hearing aids can have a waiting period of three years. You'd also usually lose loyalty bonuses, such as higher cover for optical and other services, that you might have accrued with some funds. (Lifetime health cover, which punishes people who take out hospital insurance later in life with higher premiums, doesn't apply to ancillary cover.)

CHECK THE FINE PRINT

You can buy an ancillary policy from the same health fund you have hospital insurance with; sometimes they're offered as a package that may give you a discount. However, you can also choose a policy from another insurer. Check the fine print for:

■ **Which treatments are covered?** There are huge differences: very basic policies may only cover general dental treatment; some budget policies may also cover major dental treatment such as a crown, optical and perhaps physiotherapy, chiropractic and natural therapies; comprehensive policies cover these as well as things like speech therapy and psychology, and health appliances such as hearing aids, nebulisers and glucose monitors.

■ **What are the annual limits** for ancillary benefits and do these apply per person or per membership? Some funds restrict the overall amount by combining the maximum limits — for example, saying you can have \$400 worth of physiotherapy and chiropractic in a year instead of \$400 for each. This can lead to very large differences in how much you're able to claim.

■ **Also check the limits per treatment.** Some services such as chiropractic or physiotherapy usually have a higher benefit limit for the initial visit and lower benefit limits for subsequent visits. Some funds lower the benefit further, for example after the tenth visit, which is a disadvantage if you need ongoing treatment.

■ **Are any treatments restricted?** For example, some policies only cover major dental treatment if it becomes necessary because of an accident.

■ **Some funds list ancillary benefits as a percentage,** such as 60%: check whether it covers 60% of your costs or only 60% of a charge the fund has decided is adequate for the procedure, which may be less than you pay.

■ **Do the providers of ancillary services need to be registered with the fund?** Some funds require practitioners to be registered with the appropriate state board, others to be specifically registered with the fund, which can limit the practitioners you can go to. A number of funds also give you a higher benefit if you go to their specified providers. If there is a specific register, make sure you contact the fund to find out if a practitioner is on it before you get treatment. ■

ANCILLARY BEST BUYS

The Best Buys are policies with a score of at least 70% and a competitive price (the cheapest listed first); we've included restricted-membership funds as well as open funds. While they're not necessarily the most comprehensive policies available, they give comparatively good value for money and are a good starting point; see *Check the fine print*, left, for how to make sure they'll meet your individual needs. Dental and optical are typically the most used services, so we've shown separate scores for them. All premiums are for a family for one year and are before the 30% government rebate.

ACT/NSW

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.

HBA General Extras: \$956. Dental: 70%. Optical: 56%. Overall: 73%.

Northern Territory

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.

MEDIBANK PRIVATE Blue Ribbon Extras Plus: \$949. Dental: 77%. Optical: 69%. Overall: 73%.

Queensland

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.

South Australia

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.

Tasmania

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

MEDIBANK PRIVATE Blue Ribbon Extras Plus: \$877. Dental: 76%. Optical: 69%. Overall: 73%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

Victoria

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.

Western Australia

ST LUKES Select Plus: \$790. Dental: 71%. Optical: 81%. Overall: 77%.

DEFENCE HEALTH Top Extras Product E (if eligible): \$829. Dental: 75%. Optical: 50%. Overall: 74%.

R&T HEALTH Top Ancillary (if eligible): \$891. Dental: 80%. Optical: 90%. Overall: 86%.

HEALTH PARTNERS National Extras: \$946. Dental: 73%. Optical: 61%. Overall: 76%.



ANTHONY SWALES

READER car reviews

Owners' verdicts on four popular car models.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Shopping for a new car? Brochures, discussions with sales staff and even a test drive won't give you a complete picture of a car. How will it behave in different road conditions? Do the features work well? What's it like for space and noise?
- These questions usually require a few months of use to answer. That's why we asked readers to tell us their real-life experiences with a number of models.



"I chose the Laser over other models partly because I've owned Fords before and was very happy with them. It's very good value for money, especially as far as fuel consumption is concerned, it's easy to park, which is important in the city – I really can't fault the car."

Gail Greenwood, Gulfview Heights, SA

Ford Laser

The Laser has been discontinued and replaced by the Focus. The following model information and review refer to the last available generation of Lasers, and are still relevant for secondhand purchases.

Versions: LXi, GLXi, SR, SR2

Body styles: Hatch, sedan (LXi and GLXi only)

Engine options: 1.6 L (LXi), 1.8 L (GLXi and SR), 2.0 L (SR2)

ANCAP safety rating*: ★★

* The Australian New Car Assessment Program crash-tests cars to find out the level of protection they provide to their occupants. The highest rating is five stars.

EVERYBODY'S DARLING

Judging by the mix of respondents, the Laser is equally popular across age groups and genders.

Laser buyers were mainly looking for a reliable, well-built and well-priced car with reasonable running costs. Luggage space and security features (such as an alarm) were among the less important buying criteria.

The Mazda 323, Nissan Pulsar and Toyota Corolla were the main competitors on our readers' shortlists. But prior Ford ownership (most had had a Ford before), value for money and reliability were most often stated for giving the Laser the nod.

The majority of reviewers use their Laser for daily city or town driving, and agree that that's what the car's best suited for.

If you really want to know about a car, ask someone who drives it. That's why we asked CHOICE readers to tell us why they chose a particular model, whether they've had problems with it, its strengths and weaknesses, and whether they consider it good value for money. Thanks a lot to everyone who participated.

We received a sufficient number of surveys to report on four popular models:

- Ford Laser
- Holden Zafira
- Honda CR-V
- Subaru Forester (from 6/02)

Our reviewers seem to have done their homework well, and picked good cars that meet their needs — hardly any of them was disappointed with their purchase.

"We have four kids and needed a seven-seater that's flexible enough to accommodate a varying number of passengers and luggage. The Zafira is just the right size for us, and I can't believe how good it is on the fuel."

Annette Coburn, Botany, NSW

There's been a recall regarding the car's ignition, and a few problems with rattles. But overall, the Laser met or exceeded our readers' expectations.

They reckon the main pluses of the car are its ease of parking, and the engine's responsiveness and fuel economy. While they're generally happy with the level of features, some miss a rear window wiper and cruise control. Other than that they can hardly fault the car.

Mats and paint protection were most often listed as optional extras purchased with the car — an indication of how happy readers are with the Laser's equipment level.

Most feel well protected, GLXi and SR drivers a bit more so — probably because of the standard passenger airbag available on these versions (it's only optional on the LXi hatch).

While two readers think the Laser's a bit expensive to insure, the purchase price and running costs are generally considered medium to low, making them find the car very good value overall.

Holden Zafira

Starting price (RRP): \$32,690

Versions: TT

Body styles: Wagon

Engine options: 2.2 L

ANCAP safety rating: Not tested

NOTE: In May 2003, the Zafira was upgraded with features such as lap/sash seatbelts in all seating positions and a triple-split-fold second seat bench, which allows for more flexible seat and luggage space configurations.

SPACE FOR THE KIDS

Not surprisingly, almost all of our Zafira drivers are in the 35-50 age group: the kids are growing and, together with their gear and the occasional friend, have to be transported from home to school to music class to sports training.

So the main things our readers were looking for in a car were seven seats and luggage space. The Kia Carnival, Mazda MPV and Mitsubishi Nimbus were contenders, but in the end they saw the Zafira as being more flexible and better equipped for the price.

While most use the Zafira for short trips, some think it does well on longer highway journeys too.



The main strengths listed were the car's flexible seating arrangement and comfort. However, several respondents are unhappy about the limited luggage space when all seven seats are in use, and some complained about the blind spots caused by the windscreen pillars. Driving fun didn't rate very high either — but that may have something to do with the screaming pack of under-12 soccer stars in the back.

In two cases, a noise in the rear brakes needed repair. But overall the car met or exceeded our readers' expectations.

Optional extras chosen were mainly limited to mud flaps, a cargo blind and weather shields; the cargo blind and a tape deck (for those Wiggles tapes) were missed most in what's otherwise considered to be a well-equipped car.

All our reviewers feel well protected in the Zafira, probably largely due to the standard dual airbags.

The car's considered to be good value for money, with medium to low purchase price and running costs.



"The CR-V has plenty of luggage and personal space. It's comfortable, performs well, and has good fuel economy. However, the visibility out the back isn't great — partly due to the spare wheel — so reversing is a bit tricky."

Kim Filmer, Dubbo, NSW

WHERE TO FIND INFO

Most of our reviewers used the motoring press, the web and brochures to research the best models for their needs.

The large motoring section on our website can also help. For example, it includes a powerful database to help you pick the right model for you. And our reader reviews, such as the ones in this article, give you real-life experiences you won't find in any brochures.

For a limited time, both the database and last year's reader reviews will also be available free to CHOICE personal subscribers on CHOICEextra (go to www.choiceextra.com.au). If you'd like permanent access to our car database and the whole of CHOICE Online, you can upgrade your CHOICE subscription for only \$750/qr. Just log into CHOICEextra and click on 'CHOICE Online upgrade'.



Honda CR-V

Starting price (RRP): \$31,990

Versions: CR-V, CR-V Sport

Body styles: Wagon

Engine options: 2.4 L

ANCAP rating: ★★★★★

SPACIOUS AND ECONOMICAL

Most of our respondents for this car were in the 35-50 age bracket, and opted for the better-equipped, more expensive CR-V Sport version.

They were looking for reliability, build quality, safety, space and comfort in a car, and found the

CR-V met those requirements better than the other main models they had on their shortlists: Mazda Tribute, Nissan XTrail, Subaru Forester and Toyota RAV4.

Most use their car for daily city and town driving, but think it's well suited for longer trips on the highway as well.

Apart from one unspecified breakdown, CR-V owners have experienced only minor problems with their cars.

Its spaciousness and fuel economy are seen as the main strengths of the model, and most are very happy with its build quality and most performance aspects.

However, several readers complained about the poor visibility when reversing (mainly due to the spare wheel mounted on the rear door), and the limited off-road abilities and lack of control over the 4WD system. Three reviewers found that seat comfort is only OK, and two thought the car a bit noisy.

Cruise control was the most-missed feature on the base model (it's only available on the Sport version with automatic gearbox). Tinted windows, a towbar, mats and a storage cover were the most popular options.

Most owners feel well protected in the CR-V, which scored four stars in the ANCAP tests.

While the purchase price is seen to be on the medium to high side, most found this is balanced by the low fuel costs, and see the CR-V as offering good to very good value for money overall.

Your turn to review?

We're looking for owners of another group of cars to feature in our next reader car review article. If you've bought (new, not secondhand) one of the models below within the last 12 months or so, please let us know by August 22, 2003.

- Write to CHOICE, Car review, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
- Fax to CHOICE, Car review, (02) 9577 3377.
- Email to car-review@choice.com.au.

Please tell us which of the models you can review for us, when you bought it, and your fax number, email or mailing address. We'll then send you our survey form.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| ■ Holden Astra | ■ Honda Jazz |
| ■ Hyundai Getz | ■ Mazda 6 |
| ■ Nissan Pulsar | ■ Subaru Liberty |
| ■ Toyota RAV4 | |

Subaru Forester

Starting price (RRP): \$31,490

Versions: X, XS, XS Luxury Pack

Body styles: Wagon

Engine options: 2.5 L

ANCAP rating: ★★★★★ (X and XS), ★★★★★ (XS Luxury Pack)

THE WISE MAN'S CHOICE?

Is it the styling? Is it the image? Or is it a matter of wise old(er) men making an informed decision? Whatever the reason, the vast majority of our Forester reviewers are male and over 50 years old.

Almost all were looking for a reliable and well-built car. For some, the all-wheel-drive system (AWD) was also an important criterion.

The Forester (the X and XS versions are represented equally in our survey) beat its main rivals on our readers' shortlists (the usual suspects in this category: Honda CR-V, Nissan X-Trail and Toyota RAV4) based on brand loyalty (about half had owned a Subaru before), its low-range AWD system, its consistent good press (it's won several motoring media awards), and its good-value overall package.

Most reviewers use their Forester for short trips around town, but reckon its strength lies in rural driving and longer trips.

There's been a recall relating to the automatic transmission, and two readers reported problems with the hill holder on manual models.

Our reviewers listed the Forester's AWD system, its ease of driving, handling, versatility and build quality, as well as the driving position, among the car's main strengths.

However, some were disappointed by its fuel consumption and the limited low-range ratio (see the photo caption, right). A few readers reported that the car stalls quite often when taking off.

Despite the new Forester's bigger 2.5 L engine,

acceleration still isn't rated too highly. Some owners found the seat comfort and exterior styling only OK, while others thought the car a bit noisy.

Taking the Forester off-road seems to have been on several reviewers' minds when buying the car, as they missed mud flaps and better off-road tyres on the standard equipment list. Mud flaps, together with bonnet and headlight protectors, mats and a towbar, were the most popular options.

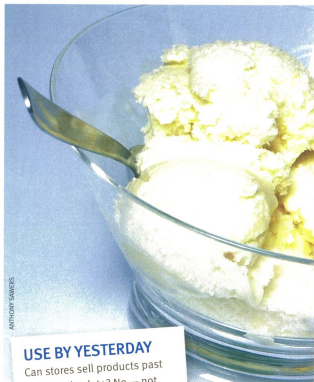
The reviewers generally feel safe, but some think side airbags should be available in each version, not only the top-of-the-range XS Luxury Pack.

The car's purchase price was considered a bit on the high side by some readers. However, running costs and maintenance were found to be medium to low, making them see the Forester as good to very good value for money overall.



"I was looking for a car that can handle poor-quality roads, and the Forester generally rated best in its class in media reviews. So far it's done all that's been required with ease and comfort. However, I think the low-range ratio doesn't give slow enough speed in tight situations."

Dan Johnston, Graceville, Queensland

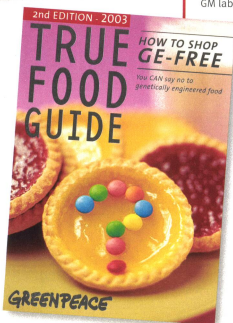


ANTHONY SAWERS

USE BY YESTERDAY

Can stores sell products past their use-by date? No — not even if they're marked down. Foods with 'use by' on the label can become unsafe if kept too long.

"Best before" foods, however, may deteriorate in quality, but their safety should be OK. As long as they're judged still fit for consumption they can stay on sale.



Where do your kids get calcium?

You may have seen recent ads for **BLUE RIBBON Calcium Rich** ice cream. As if kids needed an excuse to get into the stuff, it's being marketed as having three times as much calcium as regular ice cream. And so it does, but what does that mean in the context of where kids get their calcium from?

They need about two to three serves of dairy foods to get their calcium for the day (around 700 to 1200 mg, depending on their age). Here's what a serve provides:

Food (in order of calcium content)	Serve size	Calcium (mg)
Vanilla ice cream	2 scoops (100 g)	130
Cheddar cheese	1 cube (35 g)	270
Milk (ordinary and skim)	1 cup (250 mL)	300
Yoghurt	1 tub (200 g)	390
Calcium-enriched milk	1 cup (250 mL)	400
Blue Ribbon Calcium Rich	2 scoops (100 g)	455

Fair enough on the face of it. But if you're thinking of focusing on **BLUE RIBBON Calcium Rich** for your kids' calcium needs, take into account that, like fruit yoghurt, those two scoops also come with more than a tablespoon of sugar.

GM labelling

Earlier this year government ministers agreed to review labelling requirements for genetically modified (GM) foods. Unfortunately, it's looking like a bit of a closed shop, with no requirement to consult publicly. There's a real danger the review will fail to address many of the key issues that concern consumers.

In addition, it seems the review will focus on what's happening internationally in relation to GM labelling. CHOICE thinks it should also look at ways of improving and tightening the current Australian GM labelling laws and assessing how effective they are.

Because of this proposed approach and the current free-trade negotiations with the US, the review will be an opportunity for the Federal Government to water down our laws in favour of the US approach, which has forced unlabelled GM foods on consumers.

Our current labelling laws are already weak enough: they allow up to 1% GM components to be present in foods without being labelled, on the basis that it's present 'unintentionally'. And highly refined foods such as oils and sugars don't need to be labelled because the altered DNA isn't present in the final product.

As far as we're concerned, these foods have still been genetically modified and consumers want to know this. We see these as some of the areas that can be tightened up during the review and have put this view strongly to the government.

CHOICE will be following the review process and providing input at any opportunity. Keep an eye on our website (www.choice.com.au) to see what we're doing and how you can get involved.

If you're interested in buying non-GM foods, look out for the updated *Greenpeace True Food Guide*, due out next month. To obtain a copy go to www.truefood.org.au or an Avant Card outlet (Avant Card has stands of free promotional postcards at around 1200 outlets, such as cafés, cinemas, universities and museums).



Clean the world

It's Enjo's catch-cry, but are their products worth cleaning out your wallet for?

If you haven't been invited to a demonstration of ENJO cleaning products yet, you're probably about to be. The consultant who demonstrated them to us claimed they don't operate under a party-plan structure, but we couldn't pick the difference.

An ENJO demonstrator comes to your home and gives you a personal presentation of their wares. If you're the host, or commit yourself to hosting a demo in the future, you'll qualify for special deals — which you may want if you decide to buy any of them, as their upfront cost is astonishingly expensive for cleaning products.

ENJO's sales pitch is based on the products' time and (long-term) money savings and health and environmental benefits. They're claimed to reduce the use of chemical cleaners by up to 90%, reduce water consumption by not needing to rinse surfaces after using cleaners, and relieve the pressure on landfill by reducing packaging.

Chemical cleaners aren't completely eliminated: for more stubborn areas of dirt you use **Marble Paste** (one of four ENJO chemical cleaners), which contains the common surfactant sodium laureth sulphate

(despite the 'natural' claim on its label), but you'd certainly use it less than most commercial cleaners. Apart from that you just use the cloths and gloves with a spray bottle of cold water.

HOW IT WORKS

In the starter pack we trialled there are fibre gloves for the kitchen and bathroom, as well as a dust cloth, an all-purpose cloth, the **Micro Star** for polishing and drying and **Marble Paste**.

You start with the cleanest area first because dirt gradually accumulates on the cloth. The dirtier an area is, the more water you spray on the surface; for more stubborn dirt you can use a small amount of **Marble Paste**.

You then have to dry the area — it's quite wet, as the fibres don't absorb any moisture. Drying also eliminates moisture in which mould or bacteria can grow; in fact ENJO recommends drying any wet area, such as a shower, after each use. This would probably keep most showers or baths reasonably clean of mould and soap scum regardless of whether you used any cleaning aids, but are you likely to do it?

After use you wash the cloths in a washing

IN A NUTSHELL

- Some Enjo products are worth investing in, but you can stick to cheaper alternatives for others.
- Cleaning the Enjo way will, for most people, involve a concerted effort to change a lifetime's cleaning habits.
- Cheaper microfibre cloths are available in the supermarket — we put our Home Testers to work to find out if they're all they claim to be (page 29).

Washing up

The ENJO Kitchen Maid (\$21.50, see the photo, below) washes dishes in cold water with no detergent, which raised a few eyebrows among CHOICE staff: not only did many balk at washing up with their hands in dirty cold water (the Kitchen Maid has a handle, but your other hand's still in the water), but they raised questions about hygiene. So in addition to assessing how well it removed obvious food residues, we asked a microbiologist to comment.

The verdict? The Kitchen Maid does get rid of grease and even slightly burnt-on food residue as effectively as hot water and detergent, and this will remove bacteria from the dishes. But in both cases it's best also to rinse off the dirty washing-up water, which contains food residues and bacteria. Drying dishes and utensils is also important to kill more bacteria and prevent any surviving ones from multiplying; if you rinse in hot water and let the dishes air-dry they'll dry better, with no contact with potentially dirty tea towels.

machine with detergent (but no fabric softener), or rinse them in warm water with detergent. We found the washing machine more convenient as the cloths dry faster after being spun; you can't put them in a dryer.

CAN THEY DO WHAT THEY CLAIM?

Two of our technical staff trialled the ENJO products for CHOICE in their own homes after a demonstration. We bought the basic starter pack for \$186, which is much cheaper than buying the products individually, and purchased the Kitchen Maid dish cleaner (see *Washing up*, above) as an additional item.

■ **ENJO Bathroom Glove**
Cost: \$37.50

ENJO claims: The fibres will cut through calcium, mineral and rust deposits on tiles, shower screens and mirrors using just water.

We found: We trialled the glove in a relatively new bathroom as well as a 15-year-old one, and it worked well in both. The fibres removed soap scum and mould from crevices with little effort, though Marble Paste was needed to clean the shower and shower screen where there was a build-up of soap scum. A week later it was quicker and easier to clean the second time.

■ **ENJO Kitchen Glove**
Cost: \$37.50

ENJO claims: The fibre and water break down the grease into small particles, which are collected in the glove. (Using hot or warm water with the glove will just soften the grease and cause it to smear.) No detergents, oven or spray cleaners are necessary. The kitchen glove can be used wet or dry.

We found: It's very easy to use and works well on the benchtop, sink, fridge, cooktop and cupboards

(we tested on wood, glass, stainless steel and granite surfaces), requiring little pressure to remove dirt. For heavy soiling, such as around the cooktop, we used Marble Paste, which worked well. Using the Kitchen Glove with Marble Paste on dirty oven panels (made for our oven cleaners test) removed about half the grime.

■ **ENJO Dust Glove**
Cost: \$44.50

ENJO claims: A static charge collects dust, which is trapped in the fibre. It doesn't need washing every time — just rub or shake it outside.

We found: Effective and comfortable to use. If the dust is thick it tends to become airborne, but less so if you dust regularly. We compared it to the cheaper SABCO microfibre cloth (see *The microfibre revolution*, right) and got similar results.

■ **ENJO Micro Star**
Price: \$39.50

ENJO claims: Will remove light marks (such as fingerprints), as well as grease — it's intended as a 'maintenance' product between 'real' cleans; ideal for drying surfaces.

We found: It dried surfaces instantly and left them free of smudges and fibres. Good on glass, mirrors and polished surfaces.

■ **ENJO All-purpose Cloth**
Price: \$22

ENJO claims: Used for a variety of wet or dry tasks, especially in the kitchen. Will outlast dozens of normal sponges or cloths.

We found: If too wet it left a wet film on surfaces. The fibres removed residue build-up in crevices with little effort, though it's very heavy when wet and quite stiff (ENJO says it should soften over time). We compared it to the SABCO microfibre cloth and found the cheaper version worked just as well.

■ **Marble paste**
Price: \$37.50

ENJO claims: Together with the cloths, it'll remove tough dirt and help loosen baked-on grime. It's intended to replace all cream and powder cleansers.

We found: Used with the gloves and cloths, it does help lift more stubborn marks.

OUR VERDICT

If you're keen to cut the use of chemicals in your home the ENJO Bathroom Glove, Kitchen Glove and Marble Paste are probably worth investing in. You'll need to establish new cleaning patterns, but in the long term they should save you time, water and money on cleaning products.

We wouldn't spend the money on the ENJO Dust Glove, Micro Star and All-purpose Cloth — we think the much cheaper microfibre cloths tested work just as well (see right).



The microfibre revolution

Think a microfibre cloth might be for you but don't want to pay ENJO's prices? Supermarket versions cost about \$3–\$5 each and like ENJO cloths they're reusable — you just throw them in the washing machine as needed (see *What's microfibre*, right).

We enlisted the help of our Home Testers to try out the four products we found in the supermarket, checking their claim to clean without chemicals.

HOW THEY FARED

After using each cloth for two weeks, the majority of the 64 trialists thought the microfibre cloths did a better job than their normal cloth, and could clean most things without chemical cleaning products. They were impressed by the cloths' ability to pick up dirt and dust, and to some extent grease and grime, and leave behind no dust or streaks. Many found they were particularly good at cleaning glass surfaces, as well as working well on kitchen benchtops, wooden surfaces and kitchen appliances.

However, some trialists found the cloths couldn't clean heavy-duty grease and grime, baked-on stains or soap scum without the aid of a chemical cleaner.

A few trialists also said they didn't like the feel of the cloths and had to wear rubber gloves when using them — something to keep in mind should you have a sensitive touch.

The verdict: You're unlikely to be throwing away all your cleaning products if you use these cloths, but might be happy with them as a reusable cleaning cloth that's good for polishing and dusting.

WHAT'S MICROFIBRE?

Microfibre cloths are the latest innovation to hit the cleaning industry. They're made of minute synthetic fibres that are split in such a way as to trap dirt, dust and moisture from surfaces.

They require extra care than you'd give your regular cleaning cloth: after use they should be washed in warm, soapy water to release the dirt and dust. You can't use fabric softener (nor can you with the ENJO products), as it can become trapped in the fibres, leaving you with a hard, useless cloth. Drying in the clothes dryer is also not recommended.



THE VERDICT

Prices for each cloth are an average of what we paid.

GLITZ MICROFIBRE ALL-PURPOSE CLOTH

Price: \$3.85

Trialists' comments

- "It doesn't leave streaks like an ordinary kitchen cloth."
- "The best thing I found was that no lint was left on windows and furniture."
- "Had to scrub harder to remove stains than if chemicals were used."



SABCO MICROFIBRE THE ULTIMATE CLEANING CLOTH

Price: \$4.85

- Slightly better than the others at picking up dirt and dust and not leaving behind lint.

Trialists' comments

- "I have a lot of glass and marble furniture — I don't just like them clean and dust-free, but streak-free and shining. This cloth achieved that."
- "It worked really well, but on really dirty objects you needed to put more work in."
- "I found it was great when dampened and could pretty much clean anything with it."



SCOTCH-BRITE HIGH PERFORMANCE CLEANING CLOTH

Price: \$4.89

Trialists' comments

- "Requires more elbow grease but once done is easier the next time."
- "It's good for dusting as it doesn't lose what's already collected."
- "Considerably easier to use on kitchen benchtops than my usual cleaning method of sponge and detergent."



VIDELA MICROFIBRE PLUS ALL-PURPOSE CLOTH

Price: \$3.70

- Not quite as good as the others at picking up dirt and dust, or at leaving no lint behind.

Trialists' comments

- "Worked well damp, but a little difficult when dry."
- "I would consider using it but only as a duster."
- "A bit too 'grippy', which makes it difficult to glide over surfaces."





Having trouble connecting to the web? Experiencing frequent dropouts or slow, tedious access once you get online? Most dial-up internet problems are caused by glitches in your dial-up or operating system software, a faulty modem at your end or your internet service provider's (ISP), interference caused by other electronics in your home, or a low-quality phone line. Here's our guide to figuring out where the problem lies and solving it.

YOUR HOME

Many dial-up problems are caused by electronic equipment within your home. To check for this, unplug anything connected to your phone line, such as a fax, phone or answering machine, which may draw an electrical current or check for the presence of the phone line.

Now, plug your modem directly into the telephone jack. If you need to use an extension cable, make sure it's new and as short as possible. If this eliminates problems, you'll need to unplug everything before you dial up or get a separate phone line for your net access.

Electrical equipment including mobile phones, their chargers, some security alarms, fans and even fridges can also interfere with your connection, so try to keep them away from your modem. And always switch off call waiting before you dial up — the warning tones from an incoming call can disrupt your

connection, as can anyone picking up a handset while you're online.

YOUR MODEM

The quickest way to find out if your modem is faulty is to try another one. Borrow a different model from a friend — you'll also need to install drivers (special software that allows the modem to work with your computer), and check that the dial-up networking settings match your ISP's recommendations.

If you don't experience problems using an alternative modem, your modem could be incompatible with the ISP's equipment. Your ISP should be able to confirm this.

Alternatively, solving the problem may be as simple as updating your modem's drivers (check for updates on the manufacturer's website). Otherwise your modem is probably faulty and may require repair or replacement; check with a technician or service centre.

YOUR ISP

If you suspect the problem is your ISP, try dialling into a friend's ISP using your computer. Frequent dropouts when you dial in or difficulties connecting could be caused by your ISP's equipment. Keep track of the times of day your problems occur and let your ISP know — it should be able to track down and replace any faulty equipment. Consider changing ISP if your provider can't help solve the problem.

THE PHONE LINE

Noise on the phone line is a common cause of dropouts and tediously slow connections. To check, unplug the phone line from the back of your modem and plug it into a normal phone handset. Press any key to stop the dial tone and listen for crackles, hiss or other noises. It's worth checking after heavy rain, as this can make line noise worse. If you have line noise, call your phone service provider and request a modem online diagnostic system test.

The pair gain system — used to double the number of telephone lines from an exchange by splitting an existing line into two — is another common cause of phone line problems. It can result in vastly reduced data transmission speeds. Telstra should inform you if your line is affected by a pair gain system, but unfortunately you aren't necessarily entitled to compensation or any improvement in service.

A government initiative called the Internet Assistance Program provides free assistance with improving connection speeds to people experiencing data speeds lower than 19.2 kilobits per second (kBps). To test your connection speed, go to www.iapselfhelp.com. If your speed is less than 19.2 kBps, you should be eligible to obtain software which maximises the amount of data you can transfer by compressing it into fewer bits. You'll need to ask your ISP to obtain the compression software on your behalf.

YOUR COMPUTER

Check that your browser or email software isn't set to disconnect after checking your mail or a certain period of time. Look in the Settings or Options of your browser or email software for 'connection settings' or similar.

Running additional programs while you're connected to the web can slow your computer and internet connection — try turning off anything you don't need.

For more information on dial-up internet connections and how to adjust your computer's settings, read the free article at www.choice.com.au/computers or phone 1800 069 552 to subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*. ■



Want to boil water in an instant? Have almost instantaneous control over your cooking temperature? An induction cooktop might be for you.

They're fast, efficient — and expensive. Induction cooktops have been relatively common overseas for years, but they're only just beginning to make a dent in the market here compared to the more common gas, radiant coil and ceramic options.

We tested four models currently available on the Australian market from AEG, ASKO, BRANDT and MIELE. They'll each set you back around \$3000, so they're certainly a lot more expensive than other cooktops. But are they worth the extra cost?

HOW THEY WORK

Although they look fairly similar to a ceramic cooktop, it's the way they work that's unique. Each 'element' (induction coil) on the cooktop generates a magnetic field that induces heat in steel cookware placed on top of it. In essence the saucepan or pot becomes the element, so the cooktop surface doesn't get as hot as other cooktops (see the photo, page 33).

Because most of the heat and energy are produced in the saucepan itself, the heat response is quicker and more efficient. With more conventional electrical cooking, the heat first has to be transferred from the element, through the ceramic and then to the saucepan and its contents.

On top of the cost of an induction cooktop, you may also have to buy a new set of cookware if your current set isn't compatible. The base of the cookware must be made of a ferrous metal (a metal that can be magnetised). Cast iron, steel, some enamelled steel and stainless steel pans with an iron base or core are suitable, but you can't use glass, aluminium, copper or many stainless steel pans. Check the cooktop manufacturer's recommendations for all pans, particularly enamelled steel, as some aren't suitable and may explode. The base of the saucepan should be flat, not distorted or dented, or cooking performance will be affected.

IN A NUTSHELL

- All the models tested can be recommended, but be prepared to spend some time learning how to cook with them.
- Your choice of model will come down to whether you want a cooktop that's pretty basic but simple to use or one with more features that may take some getting used to.

What to look for

- Element size — your pots and pans need to be within, or close to, the diameter of the hotplates. Pans that overhang won't heat properly around the edges, and pans that are too small won't be recognised.
- Controls should be logical, and clearly show the power settings. There should be some sort of visual or physical separation from the hotplates.
- Power on/residual heat light — this should be bright, visible and located near the controls. Each hotplate should ideally have its own indicator. See the table for which models have this.
- Auto heat-up — this feature allows the hotplate to heat to a higher setting, then automatically turn down to a preset setting after a certain amount of time. It's handy if cooking rice via the absorption method, for example, when you want to bring it to the boil initially and then simmer. See the table for which models have this.
- Timer — 'turn off' timers for at least some hotplates as well as a separate timer can be handy. See the table for which models have them.
- Safety switching — look for models that automatically turn off or down in the event of overheating, and models that turn off if a hotplate has been left on for an extended period of time. All the tested models operate at less power in the event of overheating, while the AEG and MIELE will turn off after being on for an extended period.
- Booster — a setting that produces very high heat, ideal for boiling water fast but too hot for cooking most foods. You may well be happy with a model without it.

COOKING COMPARISONS

We subjected the induction cooktops to four cooking tests: making white sauce, cooking rice, cooking a stir-fry and melting chocolate. (See *Cooking performance score*, page 34, for more on these tests.) All four models performed extremely well — better than comparative cooking tests on ceramic and radiant coil cooktops, and generally equal to or better than gas. With instantaneous control over the heat settings, you have greater control over the cooking. See *Cooktop type comparisons*, right, for comparative scores from tests we've conducted over the last few years.

While the cooking test results for the induction cooktops were exceptional, like any innovation it will take some getting used to, especially when changing from other types of cooktop. The power settings range from very low to very high and change almost instantaneously when you adjust them. Once you're used to the different power settings you should achieve excellent cooking results.

The difference in energy efficiency between the four induction cooktops tested was minimal, as was the difference in boiling time. They're certainly much more energy-efficient than other cooktops — around 85–90% compared to 65–85% for other electric cooktops we've tested. They're also much more energy-efficient than gas, which is about 40% efficient.

PROS AND CONS OF INDUCTION COOKING

Pros

- Excellent responsiveness to changes in heat settings — almost instantaneous reaction to decreasing or increasing heat.
- Much quicker cooking time — takes about half the time of other cooktops to boil water.
- Loss of heat to the environment is minimal, because nearly all the heat is induced in the pan, as opposed to other methods of cooking where the heat source is external to the pan.
- The touch controls on the models we tested have specific settings that make it clear what power level is set, and the setting is very accurate.
- The cooktop surface doesn't get as hot as other electric cooktops, thus reducing the chance of burns, and is much quicker to cool down. This also means most spillages won't bake on, smoulder or ignite, although you do have to be careful about sugar and foil — see *Do's and don'ts*, page 35. High settings will still leave the element too hot to touch.
- More energy-efficient than other types of cooktop.
- Capable of detecting if a saucepan has boiled dry: some models automatically turn off, while others turn down.
- If the pan you use is incompatible or you forget to put one on the hob, it will indicate the error and won't heat up.
- Easy to keep clean, as there are no knobs to clean around and hardly any other dirt traps.

COOKTOP TYPE COMPARISONS

Type of cooktop	White sauce (%)	Rice test (%)	Stir-fry test (%)	Melting chocolate (%)
Induction	95	95–100	93–100	100
Radiant ceramic	75–85	50–90	na	na
Gas	75–100	70–100	68–88	na
Radiant coil	50–85	50–100	na	na

na Not applicable; this test wasn't done on this type of cooktop.

Cons

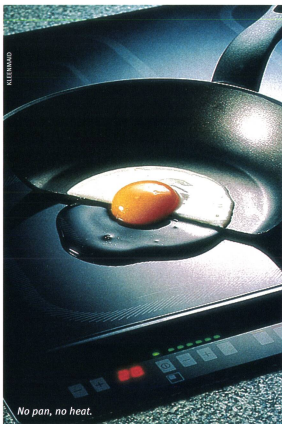
- They're very expensive compared to other cooktops.
- There are special installation requirements with induction cooktops — ventilation is important, as is a separation from drawers and appliances underneath them.
- Any magnetic object sitting above an induction coil, such as a spoon, may heat up.
- A fan runs during and after use, and the cooktop often makes clicking noises while turned on; setting it on booster or even the high settings can produce a comparatively loud noise.
- Requires special cookware — it must contain ferrous metal.
- There's a minimum pan size that the hotplate will recognise. If a pan's too small it doesn't work.
- They're quite a different way of cooking and will probably require some trial and error if you're used to cooking with gas or other electric cooktops.
- Pots and pans slide easily around the surface of the cooktop — if one moves off the element area the power will turn off.
- On all the models we looked at, two hotplates are controlled by the same 'generator', so that power is shared between them. This means that both hotplates can't be on full power at the same time — one will automatically turn down.
- A hot pan placed over the controls may damage the electronics. Placing anything containing ferrous metal over the controls, such as a spoon or pan, can turn the hob off, and you'll lose all your settings.

WHAT TO BUY

We can recommend all the models tested based on their cooking performance. Your choice is going to depend on whether you want a cooktop that doesn't have a lot of features but is quicker to learn how to use, or one with a greater variety of useful features that'll probably take a bit longer to become proficient with.

■ The MIELE and AEG have more features, but the MIELE in particular scored well for both its range of features and their versatility, which combined with its cooking score made it top overall.

■ The BRANDT has the fewest features, and the ASKO doesn't have many either. Both are simpler to learn to use, although the ASKO has a 'fussier' control panel.



NO BLENDING ON THE COOKTOP

Regardless of any possible effect of the magnetic field on electrical appliances such as stick blenders, we wouldn't recommend using anything with an electrical cord near a hot cooking zone anyway, for safety reasons. If you need to blend something, move the saucepan away from the cooktop.

Health concerns and EMFs

Because these cooktops use an electromagnetic field to cook, all the manufacturers give cautions about people with a pacemaker using or standing near one while it's in operation, as the electromagnetic field may affect the working of the pacemaker. If you have a pacemaker, you're recommended not to stand closer than 30 cm (12 inches) to the cooktop. If you choose to install one it would be advisable to consult your GP or the pacemaker manufacturer.

What about other concerns regarding electromagnetic fields (EMFs)? Power lines, electrical wiring and appliances all produce electromagnetic fields, and for many years there's been speculation linking them to a range of illnesses.

While any link between exposure to EMFs and certain illnesses is yet to be proven, there are set exposure limits for electromagnetic fields within the Australian and international standards that many appliances must adhere to. Also, because the pan uses up most of the energy from the magnetic field, and any magnetic field leak from the sides is relatively small, exposure with an induction cooktop is generally low — usually well below set limits.

If you're concerned, there are a few things you can do to limit your exposure further. EMFs drop off substantially the further you are away from the source — aim for a distance of 30 cm or more. For everyday use of the cooktop, use the back hotplates — this should automatically give a 30 cm buffer to your body. And even though the active element should adjust to the size of the pan, use a pan that's the same size as the hotplate you're using.

Profiles

Models are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in June 2003.

MIELE KM490

Price: \$3199

Good points

- A good range of hotplate sizes including very large and very small.
- Auto heat-up feature (see *What to look for*, page 32).
- Power booster setting on two hotplates, which produces exceptionally high heat. (Our home economist found this too hot for most cooking, but excellent for boiling water fast.)
- Residual heat indicator.

Bad points

- The off timer is available for only one hotplate at a time.
- Small pots or pans will only operate on the small hotplate.
- There's a risk of sliding hot pans onto the control panel, which could damage it.



AEG 6800K-MN

Price: \$3499

Good points

- A range of hotplate sizes.
- Power booster setting on two hotplates.
- An off timer for each hotplate as well as a separate timer.
- Auto heat-up feature.
- Residual heat indicator.

Bad points

- Small pots or pans only work on the small hotplate.
- There's a risk of sliding hot pans onto the control panel, which could damage it.
- The separate timer can't be used when any of the hotplate timers is on.



BRANDT IB61

(Available only in Kleenmaid stores.)

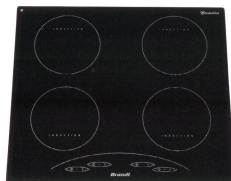
Price: \$2999

Good points

- The simplest controls.
- All hotplates will operate with a small saucepan.
- The easiest to learn to use.

Bad points

- Lack of features — there's no child lock, residual heat indicator, auto heat-up or any audible response to the touch controls.
- Hotplates are all one size — medium.
- The control panel limits the use of larger pans on the front elements.
- There's a risk of sliding hot pans onto the control panel, which could damage it.



Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE				5 FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking score (%)	3 Basic ease of use score (%)	4 Features and versatility score (%)	Residual heat indicator	Booster	Auto heat-up	Child lock	Timer	Dimensions (W x D, mm)	Origin
MIELE KM490	88	98	71	84	✓	✓ (for two zones)	✓	✓ (B)	✓	574 x 504	Europe
AEG 6800K-MN	83	96	67	74	✓	✓ (for two zones)	✓	✓ (B)	✓	590 x 520	Germany
BRANDT IB61 (A)	82	98	77	53						555 x 488	France
ASKO H8	78	96	63	58	✓			(C)	✓	674 x 516	Holland

* Recommended retail price, as provided by manufacturers in June 2003.

(A) The manufacturer tells us this model is being discontinued in September 2003, but you may still find old stock in stores after that. The replacement model will have more features for the same recommended price. It's available only in Kleenmaid stores.

(B) The lock also operates when the cooktop is in use to prevent the settings being changed.

(C) The lock only operates when the power isn't turned on, to stop children from operating it.

(D) Five years on parts and labour, six-month money-back guarantee.

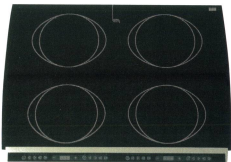
1 Overall score

This was made up of:

- Cooking performance: 50%
- Basic ease of use: 25%
- Features and versatility: 25%

2 Cooking score

Four tests were conducted and weighted equally:



ASKO H8

Price: \$2999

Good points

- All hotplates will accommodate a small saucepan.
- Timer for two hotplates.
- While it doesn't have a booster setting, it has more heat settings than the cooktops with a booster setting.
- Residual heat indicator.
- Raised control panel prevents hot pans accidentally sliding over the controls.

Bad points

- Hotplates are all one size — medium.
- It's not clear which control is for which hotplate.
- The control panel limits the use of larger pans on the front elements.

Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)
	Miele	3199
	AEG	3499
	Brandt / Kleenmaid	2999
	ASKO	2999

- Rice: To assess the ability of the element to bring a pan to the boil quickly, then turn down to and maintain a low temperature setting for a long period.
- White sauce: To test the ability of the element to maintain a desired level of heat at a low setting.
- Stir-fry: Demonstrates the ability to reach quickly and maintain a high heat. Although the AEG and MIELE have booster settings, they're only

DO'S AND DON'TS OF INDUCTION COOKING

Do:

- Make sure a licensed person installs the cooktop.
- Even if you think you know what you're doing, read the instructions before using the cooktop.
- Remove any spills immediately to prevent them from burning onto the ceramic surface.
- It's best that the bases of your pans are flat and smooth — warped bases can affect cooking performance. Also make sure the bases are clean, dry and free of grease before you use them.
- Make sure the pans are centred over the hotplate to avoid unnecessary exposure to the electromagnetic field.
- Ensure there's sufficient ventilation and space under the hob.

Don't:

- Place hot pans near the control area as it could damage the controls.
- Let children play with it.
- Drop anything on it, especially anything sharp.
- Use pots or pans with pronounced edges or ridges.
- Put empty pots or pans on the hotplate.
- Let solid or liquid sugar or pieces of plastic or aluminium foil get near the cooktop when it's hot.
- Use the cooktop for resting things on.
- Put magnetically charged items such as credit cards or cassettes near it while it's on.
- Put metallic objects such as spoons on the surface when it's on, as they can become hot.
- Clean the cooktop with a steam jet or high-pressure cleaner.

For people with a disability

- All four models would be suitable for wheelchair users or those with an upper limb impairment.
- None of the models can be recommended for someone with cognitive impairment, especially the ASKO. The BRANDT has basic controls and would be the easiest to understand.
- For those with a visual impairment, the AEG and MIELE have larger, bolder labelling.

recommended for rapid boiling of water, so the highest regular setting was used.

- Melting chocolate: This requires the lowest setting, and determines how well the cooktop cooks foods that are sensitive to high temperatures. Most conventional cooktops don't have a setting low enough for this kind of cooking, and you'd have to use a double boiler or bain-marie.

3 Basic ease of use score

- General use and basic operation: Includes how easy the controls are to use, how intuitive it is to use without being shown first or reading instructions, and how clear the instructions are (60%).
- Cleaning: It should be easy to clean, with minimal grooves and crevices that can trap dirt and grease (25%).
- Instructions: Should be complete, clear, well

illustrated and correct. They should also contain adequate installation information (15%).

4 Features and versatility score

This score is based on an experienced user benefitting from the features and versatility of the cooktop. The score comprises:

- Element sizes: 30%
- Element position: 15%
- Operation of elements: 25%
- Booster/very high power setting option: 5%
- Auto heat-up: 15%
- Timer: 5%

5 Features

See What to look for, page 32, for an explanation of features.

Layback STROLLERS

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **The bad news:** Six out of 11 strollers, including the most expensive one in the test, failed to meet some standard requirements.

■ **The good news:** You don't have to pay a premium for safety, good manoeuvrability and ease of use — one of the cheapest strollers passed all our tests and was liked the best.

■ **As we found with cots in the past, the StandardsMark isn't a reliable guide to safety (far right).**

Lots of features but still some problems.

We still live in hope that one day we can advise you to buy a baby product just on its features, as safety and performance are both consistently good. But at the moment, the old adage, "Read CHOICE first", still applies if you're in the market for a stroller.

When your baby gets too big for a pouch but can't yet keep pace with you walking, a layback stroller comes in handy. You can use it in layback or upright mode (and, with some, anywhere in between), and it folds up for storage or transport in the back of the car.

ALL THAT GLITTERS...

Sick of flimsy construction and rickety wheels? Now you can get big, inflatable tyres on your stroller, and some are so heavy and bulky they'll hardly fit into the car boot. But most noticeable is the abundance of features: viewing window on detachable hood, rear pocket, trays for baby's and parent's drinks, to name a few.

However, not all are as handy as they first appear. Take the reversible handle, for example. The idea behind it is excellent: when you're out with your child and the sun starts shining into their eyes, you can swiftly move the handle around to have them look towards you instead of ahead. It's also useful if you want to look at or communicate with your baby on long walks, or simply keep an eye on them.

But for the stroller to work equally well in either direction, it should ideally have two more features: rear swivel wheels and front brakes, so that negotiating corners and using the brakes is just as easy with the handle

LIFE WEGAMAN

For people with a disability

This assessment follows Independent Living Centre guidelines for features most useful for people with a disability.

BABIES WITH A DISABILITY

- The harness should hold the baby securely. In our opinion, all strollers in this test except the **PEG PEREGO** have a suitable harness (see *What about the rest?*, page 38).
- A removable or opening bumper bar could be useful to get the baby into the stroller. A footrest that can have foot cups easily attached is useful for keeping flaccid or spastic legs or feet in place. Of the models that are recommended or worth considering, trialists found the **IGC's** bumper bar and footrest the easiest to attach and adjust, though the trial didn't include attaching foot cups.

ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY

- The lighter the stroller, the easier it is to lift and carry, though not necessarily to manoeuvre.
- Look for a stroller you can fold and adjust with one hand.
- Levers (to release the locks for folding, for example) on the side are easier to reach than those beneath the seat.
- Linked brakes and swivel locks are easier to operate because you only need to use one foot.



reversed. Without these additional features you can still use a reversible handle — it's just more difficult to manoeuvre a stroller with fixed front wheels, plus you have to make sure you can reach the only brakes, which are now at the front.

Seven strollers in the test have a reversible handle, but only three have all the additional features to make it work just as well in either direction (BABY STAR, PEG PEREGO and STEELCRAFT). Unfortunately, these three have safety problems, or the trialists didn't rate them very highly for other reasons. And with another model (the CHILDCARE), reversing the handle with the baby in the stroller is impossible — see the photo, page 41.

THE VERDICT

We tested the strollers in our lab for durability and safety. Five passed all our major safety tests based on the current standard, AS/NZS 2088:2000. Of these, three got the thumbs-up from the trialists who put the strollers through their paces (see *The trial*, page 41, for more on this) — they're profiled on page 38. Also profiled are three strollers rated as worth considering.

The remaining five strollers have one or more faults that can affect safety — for example, a reversible handle lock disengaging, a head entrapment hazard or a locking mechanism failing after the durability test — and/or the trialists rated them only 'borderline'.

Standard certification not good enough

Seven of the 11 strollers tested had the StandardsMark five-tick logo certifying compliance with the current Australian standard for strollers. But only three of these — plus two that had no certification — passed all our tests based on the current Australian standard.



This puts, yet again, the usefulness of the StandardsMark into question. We've found similar discrepancies in our cots tests in the past — and for cots, the safety aspects of the standard are mandatory, unlike for strollers.

In addition to the StandardsMark, the BABY LOVE, which failed two standard requirements, also has a 'Safebaby Code' tag from the Infant and Nursery Products Association of Australia, which certifies that the product meets its requirements.

We used to say that, overall, the presence of the StandardsMark or some other form of reliable third-party certification that the product meets the requirements of a safety or performance standard should be a reasonable guide for consumers. But we can no longer consider it a fully reliable guide because on a number of occasions we've found certification marks on products that don't comply with the standard. So use the information in this article as well when you're buying a stroller.

WHAT TO BUY

IGC Just Pooh 213	\$219
CHICCO Ponee	\$200
SWALLOW Apollo	\$249

Profiles

Profiles are of the strollers in our 'Recommended' and 'Worth considering' categories. Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturer.

RECOMMENDED: Passed all our safety and durability tests and were rated good or better by the trialists.

IGC JUST POOH 233

Price: \$219

Trialists' rating: Very good

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to manoeuvre.
- Very easy to use.
- Has a cup holder tray in easy reach of the handlebar as well as a tray for the baby.

BAD POINTS

- Handle isn't reversible.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"One of the best — there was little wrong with this one. It felt light and easy to push, yet solid and not flimsy."

"A very good stroller. I'd be very happy using it every day."

"I felt the tray and cup holders for baby and parent were a good idea."



CHICCO PONEE

Price: \$200

Trialists' rating: Good

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to manoeuvre.
- Very easy to use.
- Light and easy to carry with a convenient carry strap.

BAD POINTS

- Handle isn't reversible.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"It's light and very manoeuvrable, but still feels reasonably sturdy. Very compact — would be good in crowded shops."

"Light, zippy, easy: super for an older baby."

"A nice, light, easy to use stroller — I'd be very happy to use it."



SWALLOW APOLLO

Price: \$249

Trialists' rating: Good

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Reversible handle, but neither rear swivel wheels nor front brakes — see *All that glitters...*, page 36, for more on this.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"Comfortable to drive over all surfaces.

Lightweight and compact. Nice, big (and accessible) storage area underneath it."

"It felt very heavy to push, especially around corners. The built-in shade cloth and extra pocket on the hood are good ideas."

"Very easy to push along — glides well."



What about the rest?

The other five strollers have one or more major faults that can affect safety and/or were rated only 'borderline' by the trialists.

■ On the **BABY LOVE** the handle's locking mechanism disengaged at less than the force specified in the standard. It has a reversible handle, but neither swivel rear wheels nor front brakes. And the reversible handle's release mechanism is badly positioned: a child's hand could get caught while you're changing the handle position. The **BABY STAR**, **LOVE N CARE** and **PEG PEREGO** also have this last problem.

■ In the **BABY STAR**, a child could break off bits of foam from the armrest padding, put it in their mouth and choke on it. Its crotch strap is too far from the backrest, so a child can sit too close to the front. The trialists rated it only 'borderline' and found its folding mechanism difficult to figure out and use.

■ The **PEG PEREGO**'s harness technically complies with the standard, but we think a child can't be secured firmly. It seemed at first that the manufacturer had addressed our criticism from a previous test (that the shoulder straps are attached to the back of the waist strap instead of the backrest at shoulder height). However, the little plastic clip that's been added to the shoulder straps doesn't attach firmly to the backrest.

■ The **STEELCRAFT** was rated 'borderline' by the trialists and got a 'poor' rating for manoeuvrability. As a minor safety fault, its back-up lock isn't strong enough to stop the stroller collapsing if the main lock isn't properly engaged.

■ In the **VALCO**, a child's head could get trapped if they tried to wriggle out the front. Its handle isn't reversible and the backrest is difficult to adjust with the pull strap. The trialists found the folding mechanism hard to use.

WORTH CONSIDERING: Passed all our safety tests or failed only one minor requirement; trialists only rated them OK.

CHILDCARE CHALLENGER DL

Price: \$450

Trialists' rating: OK

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Very wide (66 cm), which could restrict access through narrower doorways.
- Bulky and heavy to lift and carry — almost too bulky to fit into a medium-size car boot, especially because of its large wheels.
- Reversing the handle involves swapping the wheels — see the photo, page 41.

Furthermore, the rear wheels don't swivel.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"It would be good for walking, but difficult for shopping and on public transport because it doesn't turn well in tight spots."

"Felt a bit heavy to push, although it was all right on the straight."

"Heavy and clunky on corners with fixed wheels, but the big wheels with proper tyres are so much better than the ridiculously little, rattly, vibrating plastic wheels."



GRACO COACHRIDER

Price: \$499 (the price we paid in December

2002)

Trialists' rating: OK

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Was rated only 'borderline' for overall manoeuvrability.
- Almost too bulky to fit into a medium-size car boot.
- Harness is very difficult to adjust.
- Access to the baskets underneath is restricted.
- Handle isn't reversible. You can reverse the seat to face the other direction, but not with the baby in the stroller.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"Other than not fitting in the boot, it was a good stroller, but being able to put it into the car easily is very important to me."

"It drove quite smoothly along concrete and grass. Easy to turn with swivel wheels. Bumps absorbed quite well."

"Manoeuvres well, but it's heavy to lift in and out of a car and up stairs."



LOVE N CARE VICTORY II PLUS

Price: \$299

Trialists' rating: OK

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to use.
- Has a pump for the inflatable tyres.

BAD POINTS

- No swivel wheels, which makes it more difficult to manoeuvre around corners. (Front swivels are an optional extra.) It was rated only 'borderline' for overall manoeuvrability.
- Very wide (65 cm), which could restrict access through narrower doorways.
- Reversible handle, but no front brakes — see *All that glitters ...*, page 36.

PROBLEMS FOUND

■ The reversible handle's release mechanism is badly positioned: a child's hand could get caught when you're changing the handle position.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

"Quite a good stroller; a little wide for getting through doorways."

"No swivel means no good for me. A bit big and bulky, too."

"Having a pump for the tyres is a great idea. It would be a great stroller if the front wheels swivelled."



Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE		3 FEATURES								
	1 Triallists' rating	2 Failed standard requirements	Inflatable tyres	Rear brakes	Front brakes	Lockable swivel wheels (front / rear)	Reversible handle	Adjustable handle height	Backrest positions	Footrest positions	Detachable hood
RECOMMENDED: Passed all our safety and durability tests and were rated good or better in the trial											
IGC Just Pooh 213	Very good			Linked		✓ / -			Variable	7	
CHICCO Ponee	Good			Linked		✓ / -			Variable	1	✓
SWALLOW Apollo	Good			Linked		✓ / -	✓		2 (F)	2	
WORTH CONSIDERING: Passed all our safety tests or failed only one minor requirement											
CHILDCARE Challenger DL	OK		✓	Linked	Linked	✓ / -	✓ (D)		Variable	4	
GRACO CoachRider (A)	OK			Linked		✓ / -	(E)		5 (G)	2	
LOVE N CARE Victory II Plus	OK	1	✓	Linked	(C)	Optional / - (C)	✓		Variable	2	
THE REST: Failed at least one important safety test and/or the triallists rated it only 'borderline' (in alphabetical order)											
BABY LOVE Liberty LX	Good	2		Left, right		✓ / -	✓	✓	2 (F)	1	
BABY STAR Prado Lite GB-126 (B)	Borderline	3		Left, right	Left, right	✓ / ✓	✓		3 (H)	3	
PEG PEREGO Milano XL	Good	1		Left, right	Left, right	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	3 (H)	2	✓
STEELCRAFT Sonata (B)	Borderline	1		Left, right	Left, right	✓ / ✓	✓		3 (H)	7	
VALCO Urban Ultralight	Good	1		Left, right		✓ / -			Variable	4	✓

What to look for

Essentials

■ **Weight, size and width.** The layback strollers in this test ranged in weight from 6 kg to more than 13 kg. The lighter it is, the easier to carry it up and down stairs or on public transport. Some of the heavier and wider models in this test were so bulky when folded that they hardly fitted into the boot of a medium-size car or, when unfolded, had problems fitting through narrower doorways.

■ **Wheels.** Bigger wheels are better than smaller ones over rough or soft ground. They also tend to be better on kerbs or stairs. However, strollers with bigger wheels may be more difficult to fit into a car boot. Some wheels have **inflatable tyres**, which absorb impacts from jolts and bumps better than others, but you'll need a hand pump to adjust the tyre pressure on occasion.

■ **Handle.** Some handles are padded, others textured — check in the shop which type's comfortable for you to grip. If you're particularly tall or short, you may want the **handle height** to be adjustable. Some models have a **reversible handle** — see *All that glitters...*, page 36, and *Swivel wheels*, below.

■ **Swivel wheels** at the front make it easier to manoeuvre around corners and the like. The locks for swivel wheels should be in easy reach of your foot. If all four wheels can be either locked or swivelling, you can lock the rear wheels straight, no matter which way the handle is pointing, making manoeuvrability easier. Permanently **fixed rear wheels** make steering more difficult when you reverse the handle and rear becomes front. See *All that glitters...* for more on this.

■ **Brakes.** Some strollers have a brake on each wheel; others have brakes **linked** by a bar, so you only push down one mechanism to activate them. If you intend to frequently use the handle in reverse, it's best to have front brakes as well.

■ **Harness.** Look for a five-point harness (two shoulder straps,

a waist strap and a crotch strap) that fits your baby and can accommodate their growth. The straps should be attached to the seat and to the backrest at shoulder height and easy to adjust.

Features

■ All the tested strollers have a **canopy** or **hood** (sometimes detachable) that you can extend over the top of the stroller to protect your child from sun, rain or light.

■ All the strollers in this test have a **front or bumper bar** that acts as a barrier and provides a hand-grip for the child. It's detachable and not secure, so don't use it to carry the stroller.

■ A stroller's **backrest** can either be in any position (variable) or be put into various fixed positions (from upright to fully reclined) with a lever bar or drawstring clip.

■ With an adjustable **footrest** you can accommodate your child's growth. Adjust it to the highest position comfortable for your child.

■ A **basket or shopping compartment** underneath the stroller should be roomy enough for a few essentials, deep enough to stop things falling out and easily accessible in both upright and layback positions. Don't overload it or the stroller may become unstable and difficult to move.

■ It's easier to see the baby through a **viewing window** on top of the stroller's hood than if it's at the back.

■ A **pouch or pocket** at the back can take small items such as keys or a purse.

■ A **boot or leg cover** is a bag-like attachment you pull over the bottom of the stroller to protect your child's legs from rain, sun or cold.

■ A **raincover** is usually an optional extra designed to protect the child in wet weather

		SPECIFICATIONS						
Can be used as a pram	Removable mattress	Maximum weight for child (kg)*	Stroller weight (excluding leg cover, kg)*	Stroller width (cm)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
✓	✓	17.0	9.5	55	1	China	IGC	219
✓	✓	15.0	6.0	48	1	China	CO White	200
✓	✓	18.0	12.0	61	1	China	Babyco	249
		17.0	13.5	66	1	China	CO White	450
✓	✓	18.0	12.0	60	ns	China	Rubbermaid	499
✓	✓	17.5	11.0	65	1	China	EIC	299
		20.0	10.0	55	1	China	Baby Love	169
✓	✓	18.0	11.0	54	1	China	G & B Hammond	229
		ns	10.0	59	ns	Italy	Housewares International	700
✓	✓	17.0	10.0	54	1	China	Britax Child-Care	359
		18.0	6.0	50	ns	China	Valliant Enterprises	163

* To the nearest half kilogram.

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2003. For the Graco, Baby Love, Peg Perego and Valco, it's the price we paid in December 2002.

ns Not stated.

(A) The distributor recently changed, so this model may not be widely available.

(B) Discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.

(C) The model with front swivel wheels (which we didn't test) also has front brakes.

(D) You can't reverse it with the baby in the stroller — see the photo below.

(E) Seat can be reversed to face the other direction, but not with the baby in the stroller.

(F) Upright and fully reclined.

(G) Upright, three semi-reclined and fully reclined.

(H) Upright, semi-reclined and fully reclined.

The rankings

The strollers that passed all our tests for safety and durability and were ranked good or better in the user trial are recommended.

The **Worth considering** category comprises those strollers that were ranked OK by the trialists and passed all our safety tests or failed only one minor requirement of the standard.

The strollers that failed an important safety requirement and/or were rated only 'borderline' by the trialists are listed under *The rest*. For details of the problems, see *What about the rest?*, page 38.

1 Trialists' rating

The strollers varied considerably in manoeuvrability, but all were rated easy or very easy to use. So manoeuvrability contributes 70% to the trialists' rating and ease of use 30%. For details of the assessments, see *The trial*, below.

2 Failed standard requirements

These are the number of standard safety requirements the stroller failed. See the profiles and *What about the rest*, page 38, for details.

3 Features

These and other features are described in *What to look for*, far left.



With the Childcare stroller, to use the handle in reverse you have to tip up the stroller, take the front set of wheels out of the socket and turn them around — impossible when you're out walking with your baby.

The trial

Lab tests reveal how safe and durable a stroller is, but you need a mum or dad trying it out to get an idea whether it's easy to manoeuvre and use. Our thanks go to the six mothers (no fathers were available) who donated their time and expertise for the user trial.

Each one tried each stroller once, so every model had six trial runs. The course for manoeuvrability covered straight runs and tight corners on concrete and grass, uphill and downhill using the brakes, kerbs, doorways and a few steps — all with a baby dummy, just in case... The trialists also assessed how easy it is to:

- Attach and detach the leg cover and bumper bar.
- Adjust the footrest, backrest and handle positions.
- Convert the wheels from fixed to swivel (when applicable).
- Load and access some shopping in the stroller basket.
- Fold the stroller and put it in a car boot.

And, with their own babies, they also checked how easy it is to put them in, take them out and adjust the harness.

After putting each stroller through its paces, the trialists filled in a questionnaire commenting on each aspect and awarding ratings.

THE REAL ESTATE ROOKIE

practical advice
for the first-time residential
property investor

TERESA WAINWRIGHT

THE REAL ESTATE ROOKIE

Teresa Wainwright

Over the past two years there's been a substantial increase in the number of first-time residential property investors. Around 20% of investors are under 45 and nearly 30% over 60. But the pitfalls are many.

The Real Estate Rookie, written for all genders and age groups, guides first-time investors towards minimising their risks and maximising profits.

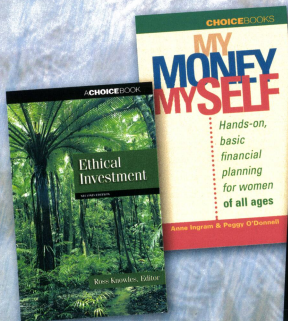
As well as an appendix of investor and tenant case studies, it includes such topics as:

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- How you can get started
- Types of residential property
- Arranging your finance
- Selecting a property and closing the deal
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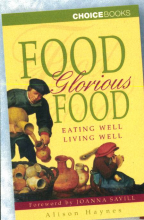
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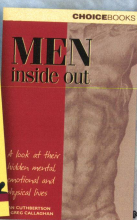
\$20 \$18 CODE: SSS



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The big picture: the theory and practice behind healthy eating.

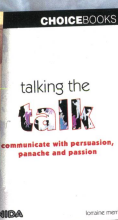
~~\$25~~ \$22.50 CODE: FGF



MEN INSIDE OUT

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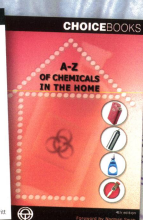
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Most small businesses need computer technology, but few have the resources for expensive professional IT expertise. This book bridges the gap.

~~\$20~~ \$18 CODE: CFSB

BAT & PAD

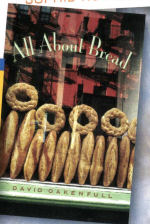
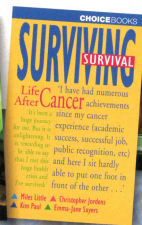
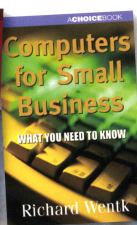
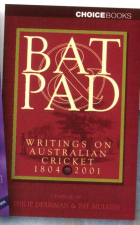
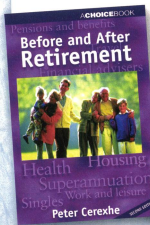
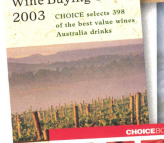
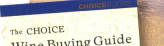
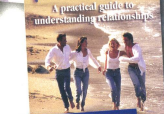
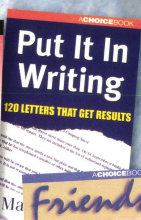
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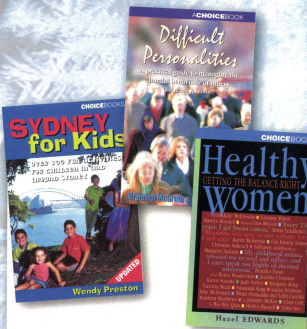
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CB/0308

Picture PERFECT?

The seven new 51 cm TVs in this update have good picture quality, but choose carefully when it comes to sound quality and ease of use.

After a long day at work, kicking back and switching on the box feels almost compulsory. And most Australians are catching up with the news or finding out who's been dumped from the latest reality show by switching on a 51 cm TV. That's why we tested this size for our April 2003 report. In this update we've included several models that weren't available in time for testing then.

What makes this size of TV popular is that it suits smaller living rooms and is also good as a second set.

MAKE THE MOST OF IT

For the best viewing experience on a TV this size, your couch should be around two and a half metres from the set (a good viewing distance is about five times the diagonal screen size).

If you're much closer than this, you'll be able to see the picture elements (phosphor pixels) and the image will appear rough. But if you're too far away, you'll miss out on the finer details of the image.

And if possible, position your TV so that reflections from light bulbs or glare through windows won't be annoying.

PANCAKES OR MUFFINS?

Each of the seven new models in this update test has a genuinely flat screen. In our original test in April this year, only half of the TVs did, despite their truth-stretching packaging indicating otherwise. See the table on page 46 for which TVs these are.

TVs with a genuinely flat screen cope better with glare and reduce reflections. Although a TV with a flat screen doesn't necessarily guarantee you better picture quality overall, the top 10 TVs in this test all had one.



IN A NUTSHELL

- The new models tested for this update generally outperform those from our April 2003 test.
- And this time, 'flat screen' genuinely meant flat screen.

ANTHONY SAWERS

WHAT TO BUY

SHARP SX51LF7	\$769	These are the top five from our test. Some other tested models are also worth considering, especially if you find them at a good price. See the table for their scores and features.
PHILIPS 21PT2302/79R	\$689	
SONY KV-XA21M30	\$699	
THOMSON 21MX17E A	\$699	
SANYO CP21AF2	\$529	

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

We used a set of guidelines developed by the Independent Living Centre to identify models in this update most suitable for someone with a disability.

- For people with a vision or dexterity disability, the JVC and ORION have good front panel controls and the SHARP has the best remote.
- For those with a hearing disability, a TV with an earphone/headphone socket allows a hearing device to be plugged in (all models in this test). The PHILIPS and KONKA (from our test in April 2003) and PANASONIC and THOMSON allow captions to be displayed with most programs by activating teletext page 801 (see www.auscap.com.au for more on this).

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Standby energy score (%)	Genuinely flat screen	Can receive stereo broadcasts	Stereo- capable AV input	Channel relocate or equivalent	Te
† SHARP SX51LF7	79	77	76	79	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PHILIPS 21PT2302/79R	78	81	75	64	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	
† SONY KV-XA21M30	77	80	75	61	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	
† THOMSON 21MX17E A	77	78	81	65	90	✓		✓	✓	✓
SANYO CP21AF2	75	79	72	64	80	✓		✓	✓	
† LG RT-21FA31	74	84	60	64	70	✓		✓	✓	
† ORION 21RF5	74	77	68	70	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	
† JVC AV-21LT3	73	80	58	68	80	✓		✓	✓	
RANK ARENA RK-21F11 (A)	73	80	71	64	60	✓		✓	✓	
SAMSUNG CB-21K2	73	79	51	80	70	✓		✓	✓	
CELESTIAL 21B33	69	71	59	70	80			✓	✓	
† PANASONIC TX-S1PM52A (B)	68	69	70	61	70	✓		✓	✓	✓
AKAI CT-T21PA2A	67	73	54	66	60	✓		✓	✓	
KONKA K2106EXT1	67	75	55	59	70			✓	✓	✓
RCA R21NKOBA	66	75	59	57	50			✓	✓	
NEC PF-51V21	61	57	72	75	30	✓		✓	✓	
HAIER HT-2199AV	60	66	53	66	30			✓	✓	
PALSONIC 5179C (A)	58	59	56	66	40			✓	✓	
OMNI 5160NF (A)	57	54	58	68	50			✓	✓	

Profiles

The TVs profiled are those in the *What to Buy* list that are newly tested for this report. They're in rank order. See CHOICE, April 2003, for profiles of the PHILIPS and SANYO models in the *What to buy* list. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May 2003.



SHARP SX51LF7

Price: \$769

Good points

- Good picture and sound quality.
- Very easy-to-use remote control.
- Sound-widening effect, which makes the sound seem to be coming from a point farther away than the TV and so gives the impression of added 'dimension'.

• Stereo-capable tuner, so it can receive TV broadcasts in stereo as well as play back stereo videos and DVDs.

• Reminder timer, which just works like a kitchen timer.

Bad points

- No channel relocate, which would let you relocate, for example, channels 2, 7, 9 and 10 to positions 1, 2, 3 and 4.



SONY KV-XA21M30

Price: \$699

Good points

- Good picture and sound quality.
- Very low standby energy consumption.
- Sound-widening effect.
- Stereo-capable tuner.
- Child lock.

Bad points

- Selecting a function from the menu can be cumbersome.
- The onscreen display is hard to read, especially against a moving picture.
- The channel erase and manual fine-tuning functions aren't intuitive.
- No channel relocate.



THOMSON 21MX17E A

Price: \$699

Good points

- Good picture and sound quality.
- Stereo-capable tuner.
- Child lock.
- Teletext.
- S-video input.

Bad points

- The onscreen display characters are small and not very intuitive.
- No previous channel button.
- No 'on' timer, which would let you set the TV to turn on at a certain time.

PROFILES: ANTHONY SAWERS

					SPECIFICATIONS				
AV input accessible from front	Front AV input independent of rear	S-video input	Component video input	Earphone / headpiece socket	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
✓	✓			✓	47 x 62 x 48	1	Malaysia	Sharp	769
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	46 x 60 x 51	1 (C)	China	Philips	689
✓	✓			✓	46 x 62 x 50	1 (D)	Malaysia	Sony	699
		✓		✓	50 x 53 x 48	1	Thailand	Thomson Multimedia	699
✓		✓		✓	46 x 59 x 49	1	Indonesia	Sanyo	529
			✓	✓	47 x 63 x 49	1	Thailand	LG	499
✓	✓			✓	45 x 59 x 49	2 (E)	Thailand	Castel	649
				✓	47 x 60 x 48	2	Thailand	Hagemeyer	549
✓					45 x 63 x 49	1	Korea	Rank Arena	499
na					47 x 50 x 49	1	Korea	Samsung	399
na					46 x 59 x 49	3	China	Changhong	349
				✓	48 x 51 x 49	1 (F)	Australia	Panasonic	529
✓				✓	47 x 60 x 49	1	China	Prima	499
✓		✓		✓	49 x 51 x 49	3	China	Pebble International	380
✓					46 x 61 x 50	1	China	Thomson Multimedia	299
✓		✓		✓	47 x 59 x 49	1	China	NEC	529
✓		✓			47 x 61 x 48	3	China	Haier Electrical	399
					48 x 60 x 48	1	China	N G Enterprises	399
✓					48 x 62 x 49	1	China	Galas Electronics	299

* Rounded up to the next cm, all protruding parts except the cord included.

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May 2003.

† Models from this latest test.

na Not applicable — no front AV input.

(A) Discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.

(B) This was replaced in July 2003 by a new model, TC-21PM50A, which doesn't have teletext, but you may still find the old model in shops.

(C) Information with the TV says one year, but the manufacturer tells us it's now three years.

(D) Extra two years \$88.

(E) Additional one year on picture tube only.

(F) Extra two years \$80, extra four years \$110.

RELIABILITY AND FEATURES

For information on features and functions (What to look for) and brand reliability data, see CHOICE, April 2003, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on the April 2003 51 cm TVs article in the index.



Rest in peace...

Sadly, when TVs eventually give up the ghost they don't go to the great lounge room in the sky. Instead they're likely to end up in landfill, where they can leach toxic chemicals into the environment. Lead from cathode ray tubes and heavy metals from circuit boards are of particular concern.

The parliament of the European Union (EU) has adopted legislation known as the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) directive. In part, this legislation not only reduces the amounts of toxic metals manufacturers can use in their products, but also makes the manufacturers of electronic equipment responsible for taking back and recycling that equipment.

In Australia, an encouraging development is the recently completed trial of television recycling conducted by the Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association (AEEMA) and EcoRecycle Victoria. The results have prompted AEEMA to develop a proposal that would see a levy placed on electronic products to cover end-of-life disposal. One option would see the establishment of a not-for-profit industry body to co-ordinate the recycling of TVs and other electronic equipment.

In the meantime, if you want to reduce the environmental impact of your old TV, many private recycling companies are willing to take it off you. To check whether there are recyclers in your area, contact the environment information centre or office operated by your state government.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Picture quality: 50%.
- Sound quality: 20%.
- Ease of use: 20%.
- Standby energy: 10%.

2 Picture quality score

This score is the combination of a visual evaluation of movies (80%) and a visual and geometric evaluation of picture patterns (20%).

3 Sound quality score

A combination of a general listening assessment (80%) and measurements of the sound for frequency range and smoothness (20%).

4 Ease of use score

This is made up of the ease of use of the remote control (50%), manual tuning of the TV (20%), the user-friendliness of the onscreen display (20%) and the front panel controls (10%).

5 Standby energy score

The TVs were measured for how much energy they use while on standby (when the TV's turned off by the remote control but is still connected to power). The score is based on the TV being on standby for 19 hours a day and watched for the rest of the time. The cost can be as little as 40 cents a year to around \$17, but with thousands of TVs left on standby across the country every day, there's also an environmental cost, with a substantial amount of electricity wasted and carbon dioxide unnecessarily produced.

recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the **Consumer Safety Unit** on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: Spiroski Foods has recalled **Penotti Chocolate Hazelnut & Vanilla Duo Spread**, 225 g and 400 g glass jars, all use-by dates up to and including Jan 04, batch number L207240.

The problem: The spread may contain peanuts that aren't listed in the ingredients, which could pose a serious risk to those with a peanut allergy.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy to peanuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call (02) 9792 7900 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Cottee's has recalled **Cottee's Smooth Hazelnut Spread**, and **Cottee's Crunchy Hazelnut Spread**.

The problem: The spread may contain peanuts that aren't listed in the ingredients, which could pose a serious risk to those with a peanut allergy.

What to do: Don't eat them if you have an allergy to peanuts. Call 1800 657 021 between 8 am and 6 pm (EST) Monday to Friday to arrange a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Australian Therapeutic Supplies has recalled **Four Seasons GlowNdark condoms**, 8-pack and 4-pack, expiry Dec 2006, batch numbers 2015 and 2016, Aust L42221.

The problem: These batches failed key requirements of the Therapeutic Goods Order 61 relating to freedom from holes (batch 2016) and inflation test (batch 2015 and 2016).

What to do: Don't use them. Return the pack to the place of purchase for a refund or call (02) 9745 6144 to arrange return and refund.

THE PRODUCT: Kimberly-Clark has recalled **U by Kotex tampons**, super and regular packs, all products dated before 230503, Aust L93341.

The problem: They fail to meet the mandatory absorbency requirements.

What to do: Don't use them. Call 1800 625 364 to arrange a refund.

THE PRODUCT: The Quang has recalled **Sesame Cake**, 100 g plastic clear pack, imported from Vietnam,

with best-before date of 12 2004; **Ten Ten Mango Pudding**, 6 x 75 g units per tray, imported from Malaysia, with a best-before date of 04 2004; and **Coconut Cookies**, 250 g plastic packet, imported from Malaysia, with a best-before date of 30 10 2003. They were sold in Asian grocery stores in Melbourne.

The problem: They may contain allergens that aren't declared in the ingredients list. The sesame cake contains gluten and the mango cake and coconut cookies contain milk protein (casein).

What to do: Don't eat the sesame cake if you're allergic to gluten, or the mango cake or cookies if you're allergic to milk protein. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund or call (03) 9543 7772 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Italian Food Importer has recalled **Zerto Ricotta Dura Wedges** (approximately 300 g), vacuum-packed, with a date of production of 20.03.03, and **Zerto Ricotta Dura Wheels** (approximately 3.5 kg), vacuum-packed and imported from Italy, and sold in NSW and Victoria.

The problem: The cheese may contain *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria, which can cause miscarriage in pregnant women, and illness in the very young, the elderly or those with an impaired immune system.

What to do: Don't eat it, and speak to your GP if you have and you're concerned for your health. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call (02) 9807 3082 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Hans Continental Smallgoods has recalled **Hans Continental Smallgoods German Salami (Mettwurst style)**, 250 g vacuum pack with best-before dates between 16 May 03 and 7 September 03 inclusive, and sold in the ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

The problem: The product contains lactose, which isn't listed in the ingredients and may pose a problem for those who are lactose-intolerant.

What to do: Don't eat it if you're

lactose-intolerant. If you are or you're concerned, return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 060 909 or 1800 063 636 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Maggie Beer Products has recalled **Maggie Beer Pasta Sauce and Tomato Pasta Sauce with Chilli**, in 500 g jars, with use-by dates of 4/8/04, 20/9/04, 28/9/04, 4/10/04, 1/11/04, 2/11/04, 5/11/04 and 20/11/04.

The problem: The products may contain sharp foreign bodies of plant origin, which could cause discomfort when eaten.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 800 272 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Onix has recalled the **Onix T400 4 slice toaster**, sold in Go-Lo stores between January 10 and February 12, 2003.

The problem: The toaster doesn't carry the product's approval number N19031, or the warning: "Bread may burn. The unit should not be used near curtains or other combustible material and children should be supervised when using the toaster."

What to do: Make sure the toaster is in a safe location and children are supervised when using it. Call 1800 886 649 and a warning sticker to attach to the toaster will be forwarded to you.

THE PRODUCT: JM Australia has recalled **Fashion Glasses Eye Gear** 3413 with dark blue lenses, sold in NSW and WA.

The problem: They don't comply with labelling requirements of the product safety standard for sunglasses and fashion spectacles (see our sunglasses report, page 14). They fail to warn that the glasses aren't suitable for people with colour vision deficiencies.

What to do: Return them to the place of purchase for a refund or direct to JM Australia, PO Box 251, Beaconsfield 2015, or call (02) 8399 2291 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Coco Toys has recalled a **battery charger with travel adaptor for Turbo-Tec Radio Control Cars: Mad Bull, Cannon Fire or Power Jungle**, sold in toy stores in Victoria between November 1, 2001, and June 1, 2002. The charger has an overseas plug configuration that can be identified by the wording "Caution Indoor Use only, AC adaptor and model number HM3513372."

The problem: The charger and adaptor aren't approved for use in Australia and don't comply with Australian standards. They pose a serious electrical safety risk due to possible contact with live pins that could cause an electric shock or electrocution.

What to do: Don't use it. Store it safely out of reach of children. Email angelococotoys.com.au to arrange for prepaid postage return and replacement with an approved charger or call (03) 9462 6566 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Hortico has recalled **Hortico Ant Killer Spray**, 200 mL, APN 93656245, all batches, and **Hortico Lawn Grub & Insect Killer**, 200 mL, APN 93656047, all batches.

The problem: The active ingredient Diazinon may produce toxic breakdown products when contaminated with water. The Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicines Authority has therefore cancelled its registration.

What to do: Follow the safety advice on the label when handling the product. Wrap it in paper and put it in a plastic bag, before putting it in a carton or box for collection. Call 1800 136 090, Monday to Friday, 8.30 am–5 pm EST, to arrange for collection and a refund.

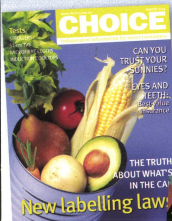
THE PRODUCT: Allfire Enterprises has recalled **Allfire Triasulfuron herbicide** (55666), all pack sizes and batches.

The problem: The Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicines Authority is concerned that it contains a contaminant not listed in the registered formulation, and so may pose a safety hazard to people exposed to it during handling or using anything containing its residues.

What to do: Follow the safety information on the label and ensure the container stays sealed at all times. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call (08) 9258 5755 9 am–5 pm WST (11 am–7 pm for more information).

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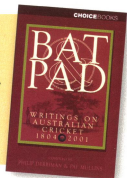
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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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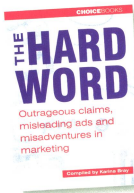
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SATISFACTION GUARANTEED?

As our reader S Postma says, she hasn't tried it yet — but it smells good!

This selection is prepared using freshly cooked ingredients including Succulent Beef & Veal chunks in a delicious blend to satisfy you and your dog.



The exciting **HARD WORD** competition

For a limited time only, the sender of the best *Hard Word* entry each month will be awarded a copy of the *Hard Word* book. So for your chance to chuckle over nearly 250 of the most entertaining marketing and advertising misadventures, keep those *Hard Word* entries coming in. This month's winner is G Rostron.

SKI **QUEENSTOWN** FROM **\$668***

INCLUDES return airfare to Christchurch & 7 days economy car hire. **PLUS 7 nights accommodation**, when you purchase a 7 day ski pass from **\$399 per person**.

THE FINE PRINT

Ski Queenstown for \$668 — bargain! Until you read the fine print: you also have to buy a ski pass for \$399. As reader G Rostron put it, "Am I supposed to walk up the slopes to get this great deal?"

Nuts to us ...

June's *Hard Word* featured the termite-resistant galvanised steel post and the Zenith packets of nuts and screws — 26 nuts but only 22 matching screws (which were, as one reader pointed out, in fact bolts).

Several readers wrote in to tell us about some metal-guzzling termites. Apparently there's a species in the NT that can chew through lead-sheathed cable and an African variety that secretes an acid that can corrode metal.

And quite a few readers wrote in to say more nuts than screws is a good thing because a second nut is often used to 'lock' the first nut — so nuts to us.



ALPHABET GAMES ...

This alphabet block set with only 24 pieces appeared in a Toys 'R' Us catalogue. Which two letters does the English language no longer need, we wonder?



The chicken of the future?

From the lab to the kitchen?

Not worth the paper it's printed on

But at least they're honest!

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Lenard's SUGARLAND

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The *Hard Word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to D Bromwich, P Davies, B Harris, C Inglis, J Luckett, G Norrington, S Postma, G Rostron, R Stockel and T Whitelum for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.